DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 829 SP 016 652

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TITLE Committee Leadership: Group Problem-Solving and Conflict Resolution. Paper No. 85.
INSTITUTION Michigan State Univ., East Lansing. Learning and Evaluation Service.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 102p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adoption (Ideas); *Committees; Communication Skills; *Conflict Resolution; *Decision Making; Evaluative Thinking; Feedback; *Group Dynamics; *Leadership Styles; Participation; *Problem Solving; Productive Thinking

ABSTRACT

This guide presents suggestions to committee chairpersons for making meetings more effective. The three broad sections of this guide address: (1) preparation of the agenda and physical arrangements for the meeting; (2) management of meetings to avoid negative outcomes; and (3) methods to overcome blocks in conflict resolution and decision making. Examples of frequent problems occuring at committee meetings are illustrated along with several solutions. Appendices include tips on problem solving, identifying constraints before brainstorming for ideas, comparing and ranking ideas, and gaining acceptance for a proposal. (CJ)

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Committee Leadership: Group Problem-Solving and Conflict Resolution

John P. Fry

Paper # 85

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OVERVIEW

It is common knowledge that faculty put in long hours because of heavy workloads and that committee meetings take up an appreciable portion of their time. There is also near consensus that most committee meetings are:

1. inefficient/ineffective
2. no fun/boring

The purpose of this guide is to suggest ways to make committee meetings more efficient, more effective, and more fun (i.e., stimulating and enjoyable). Three general topics will be covered:

1. Preparing For the Meeting (Section A)
2. Conducting/Managing the Meeting (Section B)
3. Facilitating Problem-Solving (Section C)

Each topic area will be briefly described in the next few pages. The "Meeting Flow-Chart" and the "Checklist for Work Group Meetings," found on pages 5 and 6 summarize the techniques and skills addressed and can be referred to as you read along.

Preparing for the Meeting (Section A)

Many committee meetings are poorly planned if they are planned at all. Some are called at inappropriate times, begin without advance notice, and are held under conditions where few can see or hear what's going on or take part without difficulty. Some agendas deal with only a few members, while everyone else sits by in boredom. Sometimes those who should be there, haven't even been invited.

Thus, the first topic addressed involves preparing agendas and making physical arrangements before the meeting begins. Questions to be answered include:

1. What are the objectives of this meeting?
2. Who should attend?
3. When and where should we meet?
4. What communication aids will be required?

In addition, there are several other factors the chairperson should consider before beginning a meeting.

First, the way the meeting is to be run (the process) deserves some attention. Should "brainstorming" be used? When? If a problem is to be solved, what style of leadership should be used? Should consensus decision-making be sought or should parliamentary procedure be used? Should the chairperson act as the "master" of the meeting or as its "servant"? Guidelines for answering such questions will be provided. For example, when appropriate conditions are present, a participative (consensus-seeking) problem-solving style of leadership/management emerges as the preferred style to use. As a matter of fact, the skills and techniques of this entire guide are designed to enable any chairperson to become competent in achieving consensus (integrative) decisions and in handling conflict.

Second, if the chairperson seeks to improve in his/her use of skills and techniques involved in running participative meetings, feedback will be needed. Should one member be appointed as a process recorder? Should process feedback be elicited at the conclusion of meetings? Such questions are addressed.

Finally, chairpersons often state "problems" in ways which elicit defensiveness, hostility and/or confusion. To minimize such reactions, six principles for stating problems are described.

Conducting/Managing the Meeting (Section B)

Many meetings are poorly managed. Some are conducted so that few participants know for sure what is being discussed or what has been decided. In other meetings, participants' ideas, opinions, and recommendations are ignored, cut-off, or criticized before they are even heard out. Emotion often blocks clear thinking. Some members are allowed to dominate; others easily avoid participating.

Thus, the second general topic addressed below involves how to conduct or manage meetings so that such negative outcomes do not occur. Two general functions served by the chairperson will be addressed:

1. Testing for emotional reaction (e.g., frustration) and handling it constructively. In brief, this means:
   a. tolerating silence,
   b. inquiring or probing into "hidden agendas",
   c. hearing out expressions of emotion--accepting emotion rather than ignoring or punishing it,
   d. turning attacks into problems to be solved.
2. Handling the flow of ideas and information. In brief, this means:
   a. posting or recording all ideas, problems, and issues as they occur,
   b. "gatekeeping" (policing) those who cut-off others,
   c. restating contributions and asking for verification that the restatements are correct,
   d. testing for group's OK before changing topics or going to a new step.

In general, the purpose of these techniques is to encourage group members to express their ideas freely, fully and accurately.

For most groups, the best meetings come about when a strong leader interacts with strong group members. In such situations conflict and disagreement are used to elicit more creative ideas. Power and initiatives are shared. Risk-taking is facilitated.

Some chairpersons feel threatened when they are asked to share leadership. However, if leadership is perceived of as being a set of functions or procedures to be performed by anyone seeing the need, rather than as a role to be filled by the chairperson, then sharing can be seen as positive. (See "Alternatives to Doing It All Yourself" below.)

Facilitating Problem-Solving (Section C)

Most committee leaders have been successful problem-solvers, as individuals, but when they try to initiate group problem-solving and/or decision-making, they often encounter obstacles, such as members jumping from one topic to another or jumping from one problem-solving step to another before the one they are on is satisfactorily completed. Also, when members are in conflict they often stubbornly cling to their pet solutions. Techniques to overcome such obstacles will be discussed in the third section of this guide.

In addition, a set of procedures for facilitating problem-solving and decision-making will be addressed. In general, these procedures provide a structure which requires participants to be divergent in their thinking and to defer judgment at the beginning of each problem-solving step. This approach is known to:

1. elicit creative ideas and solutions;
2. maintain order and progress; and
3. avoid traps such as:
   a. assuming too quickly that you know what the problem is,
   b. failure to consider the desired end product,
   c. limiting solutions to the first few ideas that come to mind,
   d. evaluating solutions on a "trial and error" basis,
   e. assuming the decision will be easy to carry out.

Alternatives to Doing It All Yourself

Although it is assumed that the one person can handle all of the functions described below, some consultants* suggest that committee leaders should not conduct many of their own meetings--because they have to handle four tasks simultaneously:

1. Maintain their leadership role by guiding the meeting.
2. Make content input.
3. Record the content.
4. Facilitate group dynamics and process.

Instead, they suggest that different group members be given the tasks of facilitating group process and recording information.

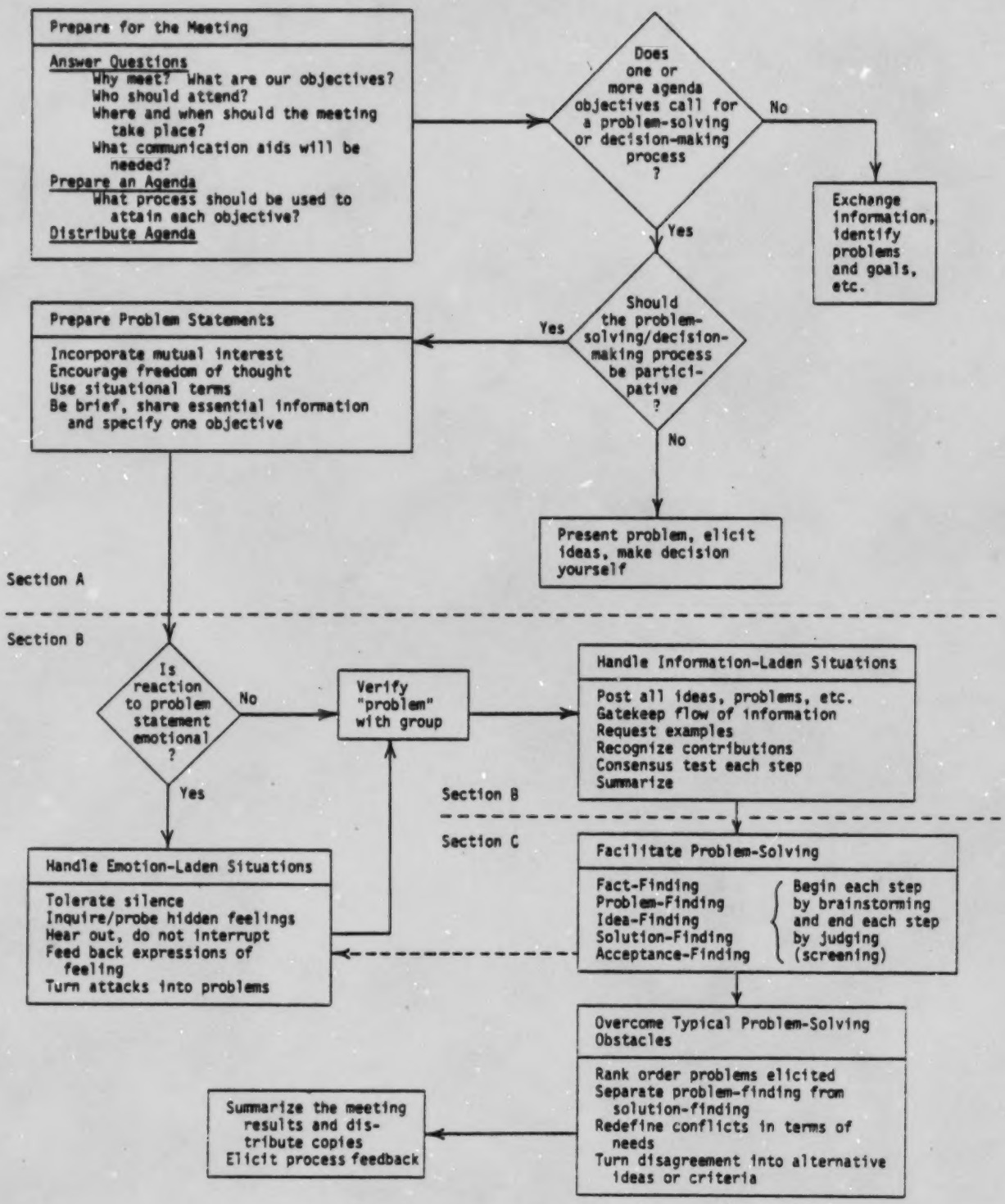
> "...the facilitator is a neutral, non-evaluative process (not people) manager. His or her role is to keep the group focused on the task, not to make content decisions or offer solutions. The role of the recorder is to capture basic ideas in the speaker's own words--on large sheets of paper in full view of the group. The other group members have a responsibility under this system too: to see that their ideas are adequately recorded, that the facilitator and recorder remain neutral and do not manipulate the group, and that they themselves focus all their energy on the problem (p. 19)."

This recommendation is worthwhile; but it does require that group members be trained to perform the various tasks. Since their instructor will have to be their group leader, he/she will have to know how to perform all of the tasks him/herself, at least initially. Later they can be delegated to others.

THERE'LL BE A COMMITTEE MEETING AT NOON.
I'M SICK OF MEETINGS! ...WE'VE HAD A THOUSAND MEETINGS AND WE'RE STILL LOST....
WHAT DO STUPID COMMITTEE MEETINGS ACCOMPLISH?
APPOINT A COMMITTEE. ...WE'LL LOOK INTO IT AT WEDNESDAY'S MEETING.

*Presley, J. and S. Keen. "Better meetings lead to higher productivity." Management Review, April 1975, 16-22.
Doyle, M. & D. Straus. How to Make Meetings Work, Wyden Books, 1976.

MEETING FLOW CHART



CHECKLIST FOR WORK GROUP MEETINGS

BEFORE MEETING

___ 1. Prepare an agenda (list all objectives that are to be achieved, include problems and process to be used).

___ 2. Determine who should attend meeting (those who have ideas to contribute and/or whose acceptance of decisions will be critical).

___ 3. Distribute agenda to participants (include location and time).

___ 4. Prepare physical arrangements (tables and chairs, audio/visual equipment, writing materials, etc.).

START OF MEETING

___ 5. Review agenda (add new items, determine priority of items and time to be allowed for each, and process to be used).

___ 6. State "Ground Rules" for meeting (or each item on agenda as it is addressed).

___ 7. State or restate problems that emerge from the discussion:

___ A. Incorporate mutual interests (within "Area of Freedom").

___ B. Keep solutions out of statement (allow group freedom of thought).

___ C. Use situational rather than behavioral terms (no fault-finding).

___ D. Keep to one problem (objective), be brief, and share essential information (facts, no interpretations).

DURING MEETING

___ 8. Test for emotional reaction, and if present:

___ A. Tolerate silence; use non-verbal behavior to elicit expressions of feeling.

___ B. Explore "loaded" expressions; post problems elicited.

___ C. Hear out, invite further expression.

___ D. Feed back expressions of feeling, ask for verification.

___ E. Turn attacks into problems to solve.

___ 9. Handle the flow of information:

___ A. Post participants' problems or ideas in your own words; verify.

___ B. Gate keep flow of ideas/information.

___ C. Request further elaboration or illustrations; do not interrogate by asking for evidence.

___ D. Reinforce (recognize) contributions (especially of hesitant individuals).

___ E. Test for consensus to proceed at each step in problem-solving sequence.

___ F. Summarize frequently, especially any progress in problem-solving.

___10. Facilitate problem-solving:

___ A. Rank problems elicited in order of priority.

___ B. Separate problem-solving steps, especially idea-finding from solution-finding.

___ C. Redefine conflicts in terms of needs, rather than opposing solutions.

___ D. Depersonalize "putdowns" by restating them in situational terms, rather than in behavioral terms.

___ E. Use disagreement as a springboard for new ideas or criteria.

___ F. Stress action.

___ G. Verify the "problem" or restate it as a question to be answered (e.g., "Why is _____ less/more _____ than before?"

___11. Fact-finding:

___ A. Elicit facts about the "problem" situation or mess (e.g., answer what?, where?, when?, to what extent? questions).

___ B. Separate facts from opinions.

___12. Problem-finding:

___ A. Brainstorm problem statements: hypotheses about cause(s) of the problem by writing them in a creative form--"In what ways might we....?"

___ B. Choose one problem statement to attack.

___13. Idea-finding:

___ A. Brainstorm possible ideas or solutions.

___ B. Screen out obvious non-solutions.

___14. Solution-finding:

___ A. Brainstorm criteria for solution evaluation (e.g., by asking "No matter what solution we choose, what are we trying to...achieve, maintain, avoid?").

___ B. Evaluate solutions:

___ (1) Examine the advantages and disadvantages of each solution.

___ (2) Use a Decision Matrix for more than three solutions.

___ C. Select a solution:

___ (1) Integrate alternative solutions.

___ (2) Suggest experimenting with alternative solutions.

___ (3) Strive for consensus agreement (otherwise re-cycle).

___ (4) Avoid voting, coin flipping--any "win/lose" resolutions.

___ (5) Protect minority opinions.

___ (6) Get fears out in the open, post them.

___15. Acceptance-finding:

___ A. Brainstorm an implementation plan which includes: a) action steps, b) conditions/resources required, c) individuals responsible, d) standards, and e) deadlines.

___ B. Develop an evaluation plan.

___ C. Develop a troubleshooting plan.

END OF MEETING

___16. Summarize results so that decisions and plans are clear (distribute summary copies to all concerned).

___17. Elicit process feedback.

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SECTION A

PREPARING FOR
THE MEETING

Process Feedback

Participative (Consensus) Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

The Chairperson's Job

Consensus

Stating the Problem

PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

Preparing for a meeting involves answering several critical questions and then preparing an agenda which summarizes answers to them.

Why Should There be a Meeting?

Objectives or goals of the meeting must be stated to clarify the purpose for holding a meeting (to avoid wasting others' time). Typical objectives include:

--To report and clarify current status or update it (will a memo suffice?).

--To exchange or share information, advice or concerns (e.g., feedback).

--To plan.

--To identify a problem, solve a problem or make a decision (especially those which involve acceptance issues).

--To change attitudes or behaviors (especially if group morale shows signs of slipping)

Plan to use your regular meetings to provide information, identify problems, discuss issues, pool ideas, and assign responsibilities. Try not to devote these general meetings to addressing a single issue. If there is an important issue which will take a great deal of time, call a special meeting for those persons directly involved and interested. These people can report to the larger group.

Who Should Attend the Meeting?

The committee or group should be as small as possible, preferably between five and seven individuals--less than 12--yet include those who are responsible for or have an interest in the issues/problems to be addressed. Try to include those who will provide heterogeneous backgrounds/positions/interests or who will be affected by any solutions or decisions that may be made. Also, will anyone feel "left out" if not invited? Consider the following factors:

Input Side

-Expertise/Knowledge
  -experience
  -education
  -field of interest
  } the more heterogeneous the better

-Individuals who typically generate lots of "good" ideas (positive influence)

-Interest in or responsibility for solving the problems to be discussed.

-Skilled in facilitating meetings (process-oriented)

Output Side

-Acceptance of solutions will be important for those individuals who will have to implement them.

-Commitment and motivation will be obtained by individuals who have a say in solution or decision.

-Immediate understanding, readiness to plan how to carry out solution, will be obtained by involving individuals in problem solving.

When Should the Meeting be Held?

Avoid competing with other activities or meeting when you or group members are under pressure. Further, it pays to space your meetings so that ideas and plans have a chance to be assimilated. However, if rapid change is occuring, more meetings offer a measure of security.

Try to give group members adequate warning. Unexpected, unplanned meetings should be reserved for emergencies only. Ask for preferred meeting times.

Allow for at least an hour and try to finish within 1½ to 2 hours. Less time prevents adequate discussion. More time leads to boredom and "tuning out". Allow some time for "socializing" and getting reacquainted. Holding meetings right after coffee breaks often helps get meetings going smoothly.

Where Should the Meeting be Held?

Meetings run best when participants:

1. Are insulated from distracting noise.
2. Are isolated from distracting calls and interruptions.
3. Are able to move the furniture to permit focused interaction--position participants in a semi-circle or U-shaped configuration so that they can easily view a chalkboard or flip-pad on an easel.
4. Inhabit a physically comfortable room (e.g., ventilation, lights, seating, and room temperature are at appropriate levels)--and that is neither too large nor too small for the number of participants present.

What Communication Aids Should be Brought to the Meeting?

Meetings are more effective if the following communication aids are available to participants:

Written Aids:

1. Meeting objectives (either written out beforehand in an agenda or placed on chalkboard or paper pad).
2. Other handouts.
3. Sign to identify meeting room.
4. Name cards (tents) for participants, if needed.

Physical Aids:

1. Felt-tip pens
2. Tablets
3. Pencils
4. Three-hole punch
5. Paper clips
6. Masking tape
7. Stapler
8. Water and glasses/refreshments (coffee, juice, apples)
9. Ash trays (place at one end of table to segregate smokers)

Audio-visual Aids:

1. Chalkboard (portable is best), chalk, erasers
2. Newsprint pads and easels to hold them
3. Slide projector, slides
4. View graph, transparencies, grease pencils
5. Tape recorders, tape, extension cord

NOTE: Audio-visual aids are designed to aid in communications but they should be functional. That is, they should not: (1) impede or block communication by being so elaborate or complex that messages are obscured, or (2) stifle flexibility and spontaneity by being so rigorous or "canned" that "here and now" ideas are ignored.

How Can I Make Use of an Agenda?

An agenda, if properly prepared, greatly facilitates the managing of a meeting. One typical fault is to make it overly brief and vague. For example, the phrase "committee development" says little, whereas the explanation: "To discuss how to redirect our committee development now that recent solutions have been implemented" helps all committee members to form some views or elicit some ideas in advance.

In general, the leader should list items which are stated in terms of what should be accomplished. For example:

--To share information on the project. (information sharing)

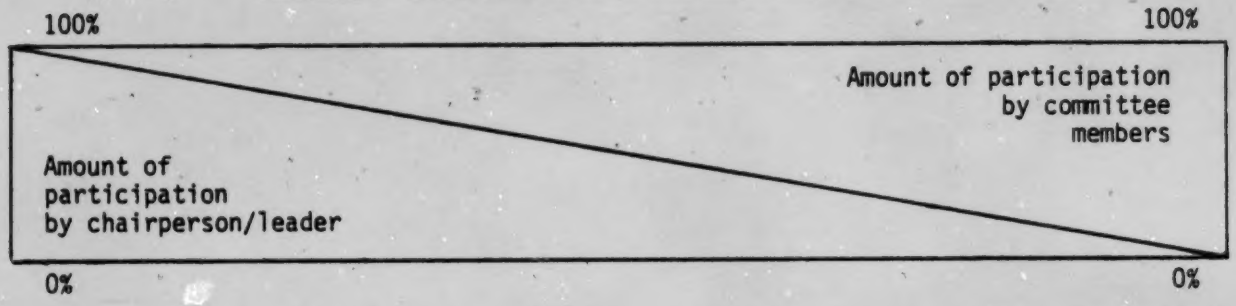
--How to reduce the number of committees. (problem-solving)

--In what ways might we reduce costs? (brainstorming)

Suggestion: make an initial list of items, consider the process for managing each (see Figure 1), then put them in an order which considers the following factors:

1. Urgency/importance/action required.
2. Energy for creativity is highest at the beginning of the meeting; creative tasks tend to carry over.
3. Some items may tend to cause dissension, others unity; it may be best to start with positive items.
4. Fundamental, long-range issues may need plenty of time (perhaps a special meeting).
5. To save time, background or proposal papers can be circulated beforehand (but they must be short).
6. Don't fall into the trap of trying to "get rid of" all the "little" items first. Those little items will often consume your entire meeting if you let them.

Figure 1. Meeting Process/Participation Chart



Information Giving	Instructional	Problem Solving	Information Getting or Brainstorming.
Leader's Role:	Leader's Role:	Leader's Role:	Leader's Role:
-Present information so it will be understood.	-Instruct so that participants learn knowledge, skills and attitudes.	-Present information so it will be understood.	-Present objective.
-Answer questions from group.		-Get group to participate in solving problem.	-Stimulate participants, elicit their ideas.
		-Participate as a member of the group.	-Listen; post ideas.
		-Manage meeting.	

Once an initial (tentative) agenda which includes objectives to be achieved and problems/issues to be discussed has been prepared, distribute it to those who will be attending the meeting--ahead of time but not too far in advance. Two or three days is about right.

Before the meeting starts, outline the agenda on the chalkboard or on newsprint (see Figure 2 below) so that all participants can follow the progress of the meeting. List items in the left column which you think should be discussed.

Begin the meeting by reviewing actions taken on previous agenda items, if the group has met before. Go over the new agenda for clarity. Ask if others have important items which they would like to see added to this agenda. Add those which the group sees as important (gain their "ownership" and responsibility for what happens).

Determine the top priority items by asking participants to raise their hands for items that they want to cover, as you point to each in sequence. Put a number beside each item to indicate its importance and set the time needed to deal with it. (Time constraints help to move meetings along.)

List the process to be used. Some issues will be purely informational and will require only presentation and clarification. Other items may require discussion, problem-solving, decision-making, brainstorming, etc.

Figure 2. Hypothetical Agenda for a Staff Meeting

Priority	Item	Time Allocated	Process	Follow-Up
3	How to improve filing	20 Min.	Brainstorming	All staff members review ideas for next meeting
4	Evaluation Plan: do we need an extension of deadline?	25 Min.	Presentation Decision-making	Ms. Smith will advise management
2	Review of plans to obtain new staff members	15 Min.	Presentation	Mr. Henry will advertise by 1 January
1	How to plan holiday party	20 Min.	Brainstorming	Mr. Evans & Miss Hanks will put out notice

Figure 2 illustrates a sample agenda which can be easily prepared for use at meetings. It is an effective tool for outlining issues to be covered, monitoring time spent on discussion, checking progress throughout the meeting, and insuring follow-up on each issue. The numbers in the left column indicate the priority order in which the group or its manager has decided the items will be discussed. An additional column, indicating who is responsible for initially presenting the

issue to the group, might also be included. Also, if decisions are to be made, it's essential that who has the final say is identified. Is it to be the group, the chairperson, or some higher group or individual? If an integrative "win/win" decision is sought, the word "consensus" might be noted on the agenda sheet.

During the meeting, observe each time limit and push for closure, especially on the difficult-to-decide items. Groups are often reluctant to take action steps and need prodding. In a sense, each agenda item is like a mini-meeting.

As the meeting progresses, use the right column on the agenda sheet to keep track of all follow-up steps. If a policy has been generated, state it. If responsibility has been assigned to an individual or group, list names and dates by which action must be taken. If no decision was reached, state that, too. This procedure projects a clear record of progress to the group.

Exercise: Identifying Preparation Behaviors Which Facilitate Meetings

Check (✓) those preparation behaviors listed below which typically do not facilitate the functioning of work-group meetings:

___ 1. Preparing elaborate audio-visual aids beforehand.

___ 2. Preparing a list of meeting objectives in terms of what should be accomplished.

___ 3. Passing out extensive background material beforehand.

___ 4. Placing "short" items first on the agenda so that they can be "gotten out of the way" early on.

___ 5. Inviting only those individuals who get along with each other.

___ 6. Scheduling the length of meetings to run at least one hour and no more than two.

___ 7. Arranging the seating in a circle so that everyone can easily see and hear each other.

___ 8. Identifying the process to be used in handling the various agenda items.

___ 9. Distributing the agenda at least a week in advance.

___ 10. Allowing additions to the agenda at the beginning of the meeting.

___ 11. Allowing group members to rank agenda items in order of importance and to estimate the amount of time to allot to each item.

___ 12. Scheduling meetings on a regular basis, even when a purpose has not been identified.

___ 13. Summarizing decisions made and distributing them to all concerned.

___ 14. Appointing one member, on a rotating basis, to record how the meeting is run (the process).

___ 15. Spending several minutes at the end of the meeting to evaluate the way it was conducted/managed.

Answers:

1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12

End the meeting by using the agenda to summarize the results. Later the chairperson should write-up what was accomplished, i.e., what issues/problems were resolved, who is to take what action, etc. This write-up should then be sent to all participants and those who should have attended the meeting but could not, so that:

1. Everyone concerned will have a summary of what took place and can verify it.
2. Confusion over who is to do what and by when will be minimized. Again, details can be verified and corrected for mistakes. (See Acceptance-Finding, Section C.)
3. Decisions made will be documented.

Finally, there is the need to evaluate the meeting itself.

PROCESS FEEDBACK

Groups always function on two levels: content and process. Content refers to the "what": the tasks or problems that the group is trying to resolve. Process refers to the group's behavior: "how" its members go about achieving tasks or problem resolution. Since most chairpersons tend to focus on content to the exclusion of process, someone else should be assigned the responsibility for observing and feeding back summaries of the group's process behavior.

The process observer and the role should be identified to the group before the meeting begins. When reporting observations to the group, normally during the last 5-10 minutes of the meeting, the process observer should merely feed back what was observed, not what he/she thinks the group should do. Group members should always be asked to come up with their own solutions. (To minimize defensive reactions, see "Characteristics of Constructive Feedback," B-17.)

If special end-of-meeting reaction sheets are distributed to participants, that data in a summary form can be used to corroborate the process observer's notes. (See next page for example.)

In general, the process observer should report on behaviors such as:

1. Were problems well defined before problem-solving began?
2. How were conflicts handled?
3. Were all free to participate?
4. Were any ideas/issues/problems ignored?
5. Was the chairperson responsive to individual needs?
6. Was time used efficiently?
7. Were there any signs of "hidden agendas"?
8. Was consensus reached at each step in the problem-solving process?

Process feedback obtained as suggested will help you to become a better chairperson:

1. It's more accurate than "hit or miss" reactions. When unsatisfactory or satisfactory meetings occur, you will know why.
2. It trains your committee members to "keep you straight," especially if you begin to backslide. In fact, they ought to be asked to give process feedback during meetings; it will help you and them to have better meetings on-the-spot.
3. It helps train members to become committee chairpersons.

END-OF-MEETING REACTION SHEET

Date_____

What did you think of this meeting? Please be frank. Your comments will help to improve our future meetings.

1. On the whole, how do you rate this meeting? (Circle one.)

1	2	3	4	5
Excellent	Very Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor

2. Did the group work in a cooperative, organized way?

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely Yes	Some Cooperation	Superficially Cooperative	Pretty Much Disorganized	Definitely No

3. Did we freely express our real problems and feelings?

1	2	3	4	5
Completely free	A Good Deal of Freedom	Some Freedom Some Caution	Generally Cautious	Held Back Most Important Things

4. It helped the group when _____

_____

5. The group was blocked by _____

_____

6. It helped me when _____

_____

7. I felt blocked by _____

_____

8. Were you comfortable? ☐ YES ☐ NO If no, why?_____

Could you hear others OK? ☐ YES ☐ NO If no, why?_____

Could you see others OK? ☐ YES ☐ NO If no, why?_____

9. Was the meeting (subject) interesting and/or applicable to you?

☐ Very Much ☐ Moderately so ☐ Not at all, Why? _____

10. Did you take as much part in the discussion as you wanted?

☐ YES ☐ NO If no, why?_____

11. List or suggest ways of improving this type of meeting in the future.

_____

_____

12. List or suggest what you would consider pertinent subjects for the next meetings. _____

_____

_____

PARTICIPATIVE (CONSENSUS) PROBLEM-SOLVING AND DECISION-MAKING

Although committee meetings take a variety of forms (e.g., exchange of information, problem-solving, decision-making, etc.), the emphasis throughout this Guide will be on a set of techniques and skills basic to participative (consensus) problem-solving. It will be demonstrated that these skills and techniques can be used to improve the chairing of any type of meeting.

Participative problem-solving provides a "win/win" resolution to conflict or disagreement rather than the too common "win/lose" resolution (i.e., where someone "wins" and someone else "loses").

Bargaining, negotiating, and compromising are essentially all forms of "win/lose" resolutions to problems. They all begin with a solution being offered by each side--and proceed to trying to "win" acceptance by attempting to "outsmart" the other side--an adversary situation--which contrasts with problem-solving, innovative-solution-seeking behavior or consensus decision-making.

Styles of Leadership/Management

In general, the style of leadership addressed here places great emphasis on involving group members in innovative-solution-seeking behavior: the chairperson or group leader takes the role of facilitating the group's problem-solving and decision-making instead of taking the role of solving problems and making decisions by him/herself.

> *Nowadays I make it a practice to call them (slaves) into consultation on any new work, as if they were more experienced, and to discover by this means what sort of ability is possessed by each of them and how intelligent he is. Furthermore, I observed that they are more willing to set about a piece of work on which they think that their opinions have been asked and their advice followed.*
>
> COLUMELLA (writing in the first century A.D.)
> *On Agriculture* I, vi - ix, abridged
> Quoted in Lewis and Reinhold, Eds.
> *Roman Civilization: Sourcebook, II: The Empire*
> Harper & Row, New York, 1966

Figure 3 presents a range of leadership styles. The style of leadership prescribed in this Guide is identified by #5 on the continuum. A short explanation of its advantages and disadvantages follows.

A Range of Leadership Styles*

#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
Leader makes decision and announces it	Leader makes decision and "sells" it	Leader presents decision and invites questions	Leader presents problem, gets suggestions, makes decision	Leader defines limits, asks group to make decision	Leader permits decisions within broadly defined limits

Figure 3

#1. Leader Makes Decision and Announces It. Here the chairperson identifies a problem, evaluates alternative solutions, chooses one of them, and announces it to group members for implementation. He/she allows no participation in the problem-solving or decision-making.

#2. Leader "Sells" His/Her Decision. Here the chairperson recognizes that his/her decision may not be accepted outright by all concerned. So he/she seeks to reduce any resistance by indicating what group members have to gain.

#3. Leader Presents Decision and Invites Questions. Here the chair seeks acceptance of his/her decision by allowing group members to understand it through questions and answers.

#4. Leader Presents Problem, Gets Suggestions, Makes Decision. Here the leader comes to the group members with a problem that he/she has identified and analyzed. He/She asks group members for alternative solutions or suggestions. However, it is understood that the final decision is the leader's perogrative. Group members are only expected to contribute their knowledge and experience toward better solutions.

#5. Leader Defines Limits, Asks Group to Make Decision. At this point, the chairperson delegates to the group (usually including himself) the freedom to make the final decision. Before doing so, however, he/she states the problem as he/she sees it and sets the boundaries (area of freedom) within which the decision should be made.

#6. Leader Permits Decisions Within Broadly Defined Limits. This situation usually only occurs in areas where problems are vague and require a high degree of freedom in order for adequate exploration of the problem to occur. In many research and development efforts, only broad limits are imposed on problem-solving teams; the leader in these cases, if he participates at all, participates as an equal.

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*Adapted from "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern" by Robert Tannenbaum and Warren H. Schmidt, Harvard Business Review, March-April 1958, 96.

First, numerous research studies* have shown that if a participative problem-solving style of leadership (#5) is competently used and certain other conditions are met (see below), it will:

1. increase participants' commitment and motivation to carrying out decisions and policies,

2. increase the quality of the decisions themselves, and

3. improve working (interpersonal) relations among participants.

However, it has also been found that systematic training in the skills and techniques basic to this style of leadership have been neglected in education and training of most people. Thus, the intent of this Guide is to present behavioral skills which will enable group leaders or chairpersons to be more flexible in their leadership style by adding a participative style (specifically #5) to their repertoire.

A recent study** of 500 managers revealed that no leader uses the same style of leadership all the time. Most leaders change their style depending on the situation. If the situation calls for an autocratic style it is usually used; if the situation calls for a participative style, it is usually used.

How do leaders decide on which style to use?

The same study also revealed that effective leaders ask themselves four (4) basic questions about the problem situations which they confront:

1. Does it have a quality requirement such that I can solve it without considering ideas, opinions, or feelings of group members?

2. Is acceptance of the decision by group members critical to its effective implementation? (e.g., is fairness an issue?)

3. Is there time available to obtain group members' ideas?

4. Am I interested in developing their problem-solving skills?

The first two questions can be answered by listing out issues that affect the problem situation and consequences of any solution to it. The problem situation can then be classified as outlined on the next page. If there is any doubt at that point as to whether to be autocratic or participative, then answer the last two questions above. In general, it has been found that if time is available and if the group leader is interested in developing the problem-solving skills of the group members, it always pays to include them in problem-solving and decision-making processes.

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*Maier, N. R. F. Problem-Solving Discussions and Conferences: Leadership Methods and Skills. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963.

*Maier, N. R. F. Problem-Solving and Creativity in Individuals and Groups. Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole, 1970.

*Varela, J. A. Psychological Solutions to Social Problems. New York: Academic Press, 1971.

**Vroom, V. H. "A New Look at Managerial Decision Making", Organizational Dynamics, 1 (4), Spring 1973, 66-80.

Analysis of Problem Situations

In considering issues of quality and acceptance three classifications* emerge:

1. High Concern for Quality, Low Concern for Acceptance

Problems in which quality issues are important and acceptance issues are relatively unimportant can usually be solved effectively by the chairperson him/herself. For example, technical-laden decisions (e.g., what background information to gather) usually will not be successful or unsuccessful depending upon whether or not group members support them. When time is short, such decisions can probably be made by the chairperson with impunity. But when time is not short and a quality decision is required, a group decision can provide the highest probability of success.

Nonetheless, whenever a chairperson strongly favor a particular solution, they are in no position to permit participation without directly or indirectly imposing their views. Thus, it is best that they supply their solution and make acceptance their secondary objective.

2. High Concern for Acceptance, Low Concern for Quality

Some problems offer a variety of solutions which vary little with regards to quality. The main issue involved in such problem situations is one of fairness or equity. For example, if a chairperson has five equally competent group members and a requirement for one of them to work over the weekend arises, equity rather than quality becomes of great concern. Under such conditions, the chairperson should take the role of a participative problem-solving leader and present the problem to the work group. He/She would confine his/her activities to clarifying the problem, encouraging discussion, promoting communication, supplying information that may be at his/her disposal, and making appropriate summaries. His/Her objective would be to achieve unanimous agreement on a decision that was a product of open and free group discussion. His/Her role would be that of facilitator of effective solutions, rather than the solver.

3. High Concern for Acceptance, High Concern for Quality

In working with groups, it soon becomes apparent that group decisions are often of surprisingly good quality. It is not uncommon for group leaders to discover that their group's solutions surpassed not only what they expected, but what they could have achieved by themselves. The fear that group decisions will be of poor quality is just not true.

However, if the group leader is anxious about the outcome, he/she is likely to interfere with the problem-solving process, rather than to facilitate it. For this reason, this category of problem should be handled by group decision only if the group leader has become competent in using the skills and techniques outlined in this Guide.

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*Adapted from Problem-Solving Discussions and Conferences: Leadership Methods and Skills by Norman R. F. Maier, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963.

In summary, concerns for quality and acceptance vary from one problem situation to the next. Nonetheless, if the following conditions exist, a participative problem-solving style of leadership should always be used:

1. Group members have knowledge, experience or special insights to contribute to the quality of the problem-solving or decision-making.

2. Group members have a high concern about the solution; their needs or fears are important factors.

3. Sufficient time is available.

4. The group leader wants to develop the problem-solving capabilities of group members.

5. The group leader is competent in facilitating participative problem-solving; he/she can control the process so that both quality and acceptable solutions are elicited from the group.

It follows that the less the above conditions exist, the less likely chairpersons will be satisfied with the results of participative problem-solving.

Risk-Taking

Since chairpersons are held responsible for the quality of decisions that are made, whether they are made by themselves or by their committee members, they must be prepared to accept whatever risks are involved in delegating decision-making authority.

One way to reduce such risks is to analyze problem situations, as above, and to state the "ground rules" for solving each of them. Thus, if the chairperson intends to reserve the right to make the final decision himself, he/she should state this "ground rule" before the problem-solving begins. To avoid resentment and confusion, the chairperson must be honest and clear about what authority he/she is retaining and what role he/she expects group members to assume in solving each particular problem.

EXERCISE: DECIDING WHETHER TO INVOLVE GROUP MEMBERS IN PROBLEM-SOLVING

Instructions:

1. List important issues that typically would underlie each problem situation given.
2. Classify each issue as either:

   Q - Quality Relevant (Issues that involve technical matters and should not impact on group members' needs and/or feelings), or

   A - Acceptance Relevant (Issues that involve the needs, feelings, and opinions of group members--those who the problem solution may affect).

3. Look over the number and importance of issues classified as either Q or A and classify the problem situation as either:

   Q > A, A > Q, or Q = A

Note: List issues, not solutions.

#1. You are chairperson of an important committee. Two of your best members have stated that they are unable to work together and either one or the other must resign from the committee.

Q	A	Important Issues	Overall Classification:
		A.	
		B.	____ Q > A
		C.	____ A > Q
		D.	____ Q = A
		E.	

#2. You are chairperson of a busy workgroup. Poor communications with other workgroups in the organization have slowed your group down and caused critical delays in meeting deadlines.

Q	A	Important Issues	Overall Classification:
		A.	
		B.	____ Q > A
		C.	____ A > Q
		D.	____ Q = A
		E.	

Problem Situation #1

Q	A	Important Issues
✓		A. Past performance/value of each?
	✓	E. Effect on group's operation?
	✓	C. Can replacement be found?
✓		D. Effect on my leadership?
	✓	E. What is basis of disagreement?

Overall classification: A > Q

Problem Situation #2

Q	A	Important Issues
✓		A. Effect on organization's performance?
	✓	B. Effect on my group's morale?
	✓	C. Effect on other work group's operation?
✓		D. Effect on my leadership?
	✓	E. Effect on my group performance?

Overall classification: Q > A

The chairman's job

Excerpted from:

"How to Run a Meeting" by Antony Jay. Harvard Business Review, March-April 1976, pp. 43-57.

Let's say that you have just been appointed chairman of the committee. You tell everyone that it is a bore or a chore. You also tell them that you have been appointed "for my sins." But the point is that you tell them. There is no getting away from it: some sort of honor or glory attaches to the chairman's role. Almost everyone is in some way pleased and proud to be made chairman of something. And that is three quarters of the trouble.

Master or servant?

Their appointment as committee chairman takes people in different ways. Some seize the opportunity to impose their will on a group that they see themselves licensed to dominate. Their chairmanship is a harangue, interspersed with demands for group agreement.

Others are more like scoutmasters, for whom the collective activity of the group is satisfaction enough, with no need for achievement. Their chairmanship is more like the endless stoking and fueling of a campfire that is not cooking anything.

And there are the insecure or lazy chairmen who look to the meeting for reassurance and support in their ineffectiveness and inactivity, so that they can spread the responsibility for their indecisiveness among the whole group. They seize on every expression of disagreement or doubt as a justification for avoiding decision or action.

But even the large majority who do not go to those extremes still feel a certain pleasurable tumescence of the ego when they take their place at the head of the table for the first time. The feeling is no sin: the sin is to indulge it or to assume that the pleasure is shared by the other members of the meeting.

It is the chairman's self-indulgence that is the greatest single barrier to the success of a meeting. His first duty, then, is to be aware of the temptation and

of the dangers of yielding to it. The clearest of the danger signals is hearing himself talking a lot during a discussion.

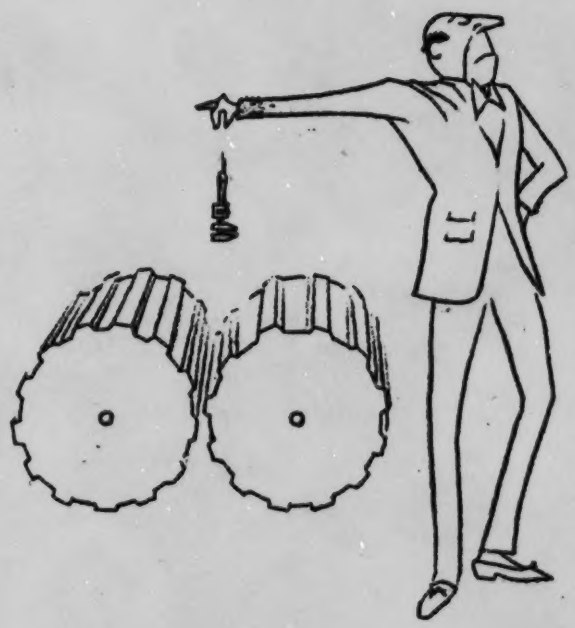
One of the best chairmen I have ever served under makes it a rule to restrict her interventions to a single sentence, or at most two. She forbids herself ever to contribute a paragraph to a meeting she is chairing. It is a harsh rule, but you would be hard put to find a regular attender of her meetings (or anyone else's) who thought it was a bad one.

There is, in fact, only one legitimate source of pleasure in chairmanship, and that is pleasure in the achievements of the meeting—and to be legitimate, it must be shared by all those present. Meetings are *necessary* for all sorts of basic and primitive human reasons, but they are *useful* only if they are seen by all present to be getting somewhere—and somewhere they know they could not have gotten to individually.

If the chairman is to make sure that the meeting achieves valuable objectives, he will be more effective seeing himself as the servant of the group rather than as its master. His role then becomes that of assisting the group toward the best conclusion or decision in the most efficient manner possible: to interpret and clarify, to move the discussion forward, and to bring it to a resolution that everyone understands and accepts as being the will of the meeting, even if the individuals do not necessarily agree with it.

His true source of authority with the members is the strength of his perceived commitment to their combined objective and his skill and efficiency in helping and guiding them to its achievement. Control and discipline then become not the act of imposing his will on the group but of imposing the group's will on any individual who is in danger of diverting or delaying the progress of the discussion and so from realizing the objective.

Once the members realize that the leader is impelled by his commitment to their common objective, it does not take great force of personality for him to control the meeting. Indeed, a sense of urgency and a clear desire to reach the best conclusion as quickly as possible are a much more effective disciplinary instrument than a big gavel. The effective chairman can then hold the discussion to the point by indicating that there is no time to pursue a particular idea now, that there is no time for long speeches, that the group has to get through



this item and on to the next one, rather than by resorting to pulling rank.

There are many polite ways the chairman can indicate a slight impatience even when someone else is speaking—by leaning forward, fixing his eyes on the speaker, tensing his muscles, raising his eyebrows, or nodding briefly to show the point is taken. And when replying or commenting, the chairman can indicate by the speed, brevity, and finality of his intonation that "we have to move on." Conversely, he can reward the sort of contribution he is seeking by the opposite expressions and intonations, showing that there is plenty of time for that sort of idea, and encouraging the speaker to develop the point.

After a few meetings, all present readily understand this nonverbal language of chairmanship. It is the chairman's chief instrument of educating the group into the general type of "meeting behavior" that he is looking for. He is still the servant of the group, but like a hired mountain guide, he is the one who knows the destination, the route, the weather signs, and the time the journey will take. So if he suggests that the members walk a bit faster, they take his advice.

"In authority, not an authority."

CONSENSUS

If all parties to a conflict are to accept the outcome willingly, the conditions or needs that each feels are essential for a satisfactory solution must be met. Consider what Likert* has written:

> The use of consensus is essential at each step in the decision-making process and especially in the selection of the final agreement if the solution is to be win-win. Consensus, in Quaker terms, is "the sense of the meeting," a willing acceptance of the group's conclusions. The process of arriving at consensus is a free and open exchange of ideas which continues until agreement has been reached. This process assures that each individual's concerns are heard and understood and that a sincere attempt has been made to take them into consideration in the search for and the formulation of a conclusion. This conclusion may not reflect the exact wishes of each member, but since it does not violate the deep concerns of anyone, it can be agreed upon by all.
>
> Consensus, then, is a cooperative effort to find a sound solution acceptable to everyone rather than a competitive struggle in which an unacceptable solution is forced on the losers. With consensus as the pattern of interaction, members need not fear being outsmarted or outmaneuvered. They can be frank, candid, and authentic in their interactions at all steps in the decision-making process. (p. 146)

More specifically:

1. A group has reached consensus when it is sufficiently in agreement to move forward or to make a decision. Consensus does <u>not</u> mean that everyone agrees on every detail. Consensus means that a sufficient number of participants are in favor of making a solution or a decision to move ahead, while remaining participants who disagree at least understand the decision and are willing to go ahead without obstruction.

2. Consensus decision-making is <u>not voting</u>; it depends on everyone's cooperation--not just majority rule. It means seeing that <u>every</u> member of the group is sufficiently satisfied to proceed.

3. If consensus exists (and consensus should <u>not</u> be tested until there is a strong likelihood that it does exist), group members should signify this and go on to the next step or problem. If consensus does <u>not</u> exist, the process of testing for it will automatically produce further discussion in the area(s) of discord.

4. When all participants signify their agreement, the person testing for consensus is responsible for making certain that anyone who did not speak out is encouraged to express his views. Examples:

   (a) "Are we ready to accept Solution C?....
   (chorus of "yes")
   "...What about you, John?...and Morris?....
   (They didn't say "yes" with the corus.)
   "...Does anyone disagree?...."

---

* Likert, Rensis and Jane Likert. <u>New Ways of Managing Conflict</u>, New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1976.

(b) "Are we ready to leave this now and go on to the next idea?....
"Are you ready, Arthur?..."

Action Without Consensus

At times, a problem will be so difficult or the hostilities will be so great that even with able leadership and the use of the backup, recycling procedure, the group is unable to reach consensus on a final solution within the time available for its deliberation. When this occurs, the leader may face situational requirements which necessitate that something be done by a given time and be compelled to take action.

There are several courses open. If the group is a unit in a hierarchical organization, the leader can select the solution that best meets the essential conditions and that is least detrimental to any of these conditions. Another alternative, which may be less damaging to the group, is for the leader to suggest that, since they have not reached consensus and yet action must be taken, they proceed with the solution favored by the persons who have the major responsibility for implementing the decisions since it is up to them to make it work. This procedure usually meets with a favorable response providing that the solution does not seriously violate any of the conditions felt to be essential by the group or some of its members. (pp. 150-151)

Parliamentary Procedure

Since the parliamentary procedure and Robert's Rules of Order are widely used today in dealing with conflict, their capacity to achieve consensus and win-win solutions deserve to be examined. As a rule, parliamentary procedures structure an interaction into a win-lose relationship. The rigidity of a formal motion with changes possible only by amendment makes the orderly problem-solving steps required for the search and discovery of a mutually acceptable solution difficult if not impossible. The parliamentary struggle is a confrontation between alternative solutions already formulated. Arguing from a fixed position rules out the possibility of innovative ideas generated by the systematic search for them in a free and open manner. Rules such as tabling the motion in an attempt to defeat an opposing position or the maneuvering of countermotions and amendments are devices that can transform a group of well-intentioned and intelligent persons into warring camps. In the heat of the argument, bruising statements may be made which never are entirely forgotten or forgiven. Parliamentary procedures typically yield a win-lose rather than a win-win outcome. (p. 147)

Bargaining, negotiating, compromising, and similar approaches to the handling of conflict are, essentially, forms of win-lose confrontation. They all start with a relatively clear solution which each party to the conflict prefers and wishes to attain. Each party strives to attain its preferred solution by forcing it on the other

party, by outsmarting the opponent. If unable to achieve complete success, each party seeks to attain as much of its preferred solution as possible. A polarized, adversary orientation is maintained at all times. All these various forms of win-lose conflict fail to create the problem-solving orientations and processes which stimulate the search for innovative solutions acceptable to both parties.

Mediation almost always starts with the conflicting parties locked in a win-lose battle. Commonly, the negotiator persuades each party to compromise its position step by step until a position is reached which both parties will accept, although often reluctantly.

The most able mediators appear to go beyond this compromise approach and at least partially, use the kind of innovative, problem-solving search for solutions acceptable to both parties that we shall discuss at length in subsequent chapters.

Ignoring the conflict, burying it, or withdrawing or running from it are, like win-lose, unsatisfactory ways to deal with conflict. These passive approaches allow conflict to fester under the surface and often to become worse over time. (p. 62)

DO I HEAR A MOTION ON THAT?
SO MOVE
SECOND
DISCUSSION?
I MOVE THE QUESTION
ANY NAYS?
NEXT ON THE AGENDA
I COULD NEVER BE AN OFFICER. I DON'T SPEAK THE LANGUAGE

ALL AGAINST THE PROPOSAL, RAISE YOUR HAND
THE PROPOSAL IS DEFEATED
HOO HOO HOO
OH, NO, NOT AGAIN
YOU GUYS NEVER DO WHAT I WANT TO DO
HOO HOO HOO

STATING THE PROBLEM

After a committee leader has "sensed" a "problem" his/her next step is to carefully consider the best way to present the "problem" to the group. Success or failure in obtaining a good solution often hinges on this brief initial phase of group problem-solving. In general, the objective at this point is to prevent:

(a) group defensiveness--due to their feeling blamed,
(b) group hostility--due to their feeling threatened,
(c) vague or confusing statements--due to the chairperson's trying to either avoid hurting feelings or trying to achieve several objectives at the same time, or
(d) manipulation--trying to steer thinking of the group into the leader's way of thinking without openly revealing his/her personal preferences.

Through research, N. R. F. Maier has determined that there are:

Six Principles for Stating "Problems" to groups

1. Incorporate Mutual Interest (within your area of freedom);
2. Encourage Freedom of Thought (suggest no solutions);
3. Use Situational rather than Behavioral Terms;
4. Keep the Statement Brief;
5. Share Essential Information;
6. Specify Only One Objective.

Since it is common for committee leaders to violate all of these principles, almost any use of them represents a gain--so don't try to be perfect--especially during initial attempts to use them. Each will now be explained in detail:

1. Incorporate Mutual Interest

The effectiveness of group problem-solving is greatly influenced by the amount of mutual interest the problem arouses. To generate mutual interest, the problem statement should be worded so as to include needs, interests or concerns of group members. Although organizational problems usually are not meaningful to group members, if such problems can be stated bringing group interests into play, then the problem can become meaningful. (Examples: Status, fairness, recognition, group acceptance, and experiences of success or failure.)

Area of Freedom: Problem-solvers often tend to overlook themselves as objects of change. Ideas for improvement are frequently expressed in the form of actions that others should take. This tendency is unproductive because it requires waiting for outsiders to make the changes you recommend. Problem-solving is most effective when it is in terms of "what can we do to improve the situation." It follows that problems for group decision should be, if possible, located within the chairperson's "area of freedom." A chairperson's "area of freedom" is limited by his/her authority or jurisdiction for making

decisions. Each level of supervision has such an area, even though its boundaries may be clear or vague, large or small. Of course, a large and clear-cut "area of freedom" stimulates problem solvers to explore a wider variety of solutions. (Delegation of authority has its value at this point.)

Although it is good to state the "area of freedom," it is still better to stimulate exploration rather than impose limitations during the initial phases of problem-solving discussions. Later on, constraints and limitations on possible solutions can be clarified and confronted. In other words, do not limit the problem by stating it only in terms of "what can we do"--this would discourage any constructive suggestions that might be used as recommendations to higher ups.

2. Encourage Freedom of Thought (Suggest No Solutions)

When introducing a "problem," any solutions suggested by the chairperson interfere with free thinking. One group response is to accept all leader suggestions and become "yes-men." Often individuals fear unfavorable reactions to their own ideas; so, instead, they just praise the chairperson's ideas. Another group reaction is to criticize their leader's suggested solution. In addition to limiting the process of evaluation to accepting or rejecting the solution, this places the leader on the defensive. Therefore, it is best to avoid suggesting a solution and leave the problem solving up to the group.

For example, suppose a chairperson poses the following problem: "How can I get rid of a member who is popular in the group but disrupts the work of others?" It is obvious that this statement incorporates a solution into the statement of the problem. In essence, the chairperson is asking: "How can I apply my solution to the problem and get the group to accept it?" There may be many possible solutions and "elimination" is only one of them.

3. Use Situational Rather than Behavioral Terms

To state a problem in terms of individuals' behavior implies criticism or blame. Usually, the group will band together in defense--against the leader. When group members are unafraid, typically they'll react with:

"We're not any worse than others!"
"What do you intend to do about it?"
"It's not our fault!"

When fear is present, the response will probably be silence.

In contrast, a situational statement asks: "How can we improve this situation?"--it does not criticize or blame anyone. The leader requests help from the group, rather than standing in judgment of them. It is far better to focus on what was wrong than on who was wrong, because altering situations is easier than changing people. Yet people often will make changes in their behavior, if the changes are their own ideas. It follows that a discussion to change a "situation" may lead to suggestions by group members to "modify their own behavior." Resistance to change is primarily

a form of defense, and a group's defense is greatest when it has been criticized or attacked from the outside.

4. Keep the "Problem" Introduction Brief.

If the problem statement is too long, it may tend to prevent discussion, convey the impression that the chairperson is trying to manipulate thinking, or promote misunderstanding. Group members will begin to think: "What is the problem actually?"

If unclear, questions will be asked. If so, the leader should only clarify his/her original statement. If the leader is asked for his/her views, he/she should reply that he/she wants the benefit of the group's thinking. Such questions are frequently used to test the leader's sincerity and openness to alternative views. Most important, after the problem statement, the chairperson must pause long enough for a response to be initiated by a member of the group.

5. Share Essential Information

All facts in the chairperson's possession which bear on the problem should be shared with the group. In sharing this knowledge with group members one increases their problem-solving potential. It is in the pooling of information and experiences that much is to be gained in group problem-solving.

However, the presentation of information should not be confused with attempts to influence solutions. The important thing is to supply information without interpreting it or suggesting how the information is to be used. At the least, facts and interpretation of facts should be clearly distinguished. Facts by themselves are neither good nor bad--it is in their interpretation that such values are introduced.

6. Specify Only One Objective

We can assume that the initial purpose of a solution is to achieve a particular objective or goal statement. If several solutions achieve the same initial objective, they may then be compared in terms of these by-products and their relative efficiency noted. If there are two or more objectives specified, confusion will be rampant or factions will develop. Thus, problem-solving should begin by having the major objective clearly stated so that all solutions under consideration can be compared with the same standard in mind.

EXERCISE: STATING THE PROBLEM

Instructions: Rewrite each problem statement so that it:

A. Incorporates mutual interest.
B. Increases the number of solutions possible.
C. Is written in situational, not behavioral terms.

#1. "You four people always come to meetings late. When are you going to start coming on time!?"

#2. "Sue and Hal have been interrupting others since we began this meeting. Should I repeat the "ground rules" for them?"

#3. "Ervin and Gregory are still fighting and interfering with our progress. Further, they can't seem to resolve their differences. Which one should we ask to leave the team?"

#1. "Meetings never seem to start on time. In what ways can we arrange it so that we can all meet together at a common starting time?"

#2. "In what ways can we ensure that our meetings are run by a commonly agreed-upon set of "ground rules"?"

#3. "Whenever members of this group have differences which affect the performance of this group, it seems we ought to do something. Does anyone have any suggestions?"

SECTION B

CONDUCTING/MANAGING
THE MEETING

Handling Emotion-Laden and
Information-Laden Situations

GENTLEMEN, I'LL WRITE THE NEW PROPOSAL ON THE BLACKBOARD SO YOU CAN STUDY IT CAREFULLY
8-7
I FEEL THIS MAY BE A SLIGHTLY CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE

CONDUCTING/MANAGING THE MEETING

This section focuses on two critical functions that chairpersons and committee members must carry out during meetings, especially if they are to be productive and enjoyable:

1. Handling emotion-laden situations.
2. Handling information-laden situations.

Any group tends to swing back and forth between a focus on getting the work done (e.g., problem evaluation) and a focus on social-emotional issues (e.g., frustration with a lack of consensus). Whenever social-emotional issues arise, they should be dealt with--immediately if possible. Otherwise they tend to block communication and delay productive activity.

For example, take the situation where a group is productively discussing an issue and one member begins to "hog" the floor by bringing up extraneous ideas. This behavior will eventually disrupt the group; it makes other group members angry. Before the group can focus entirely on productive discussion again, the group leader (or the group) will have to facilitate the resolution of this social-emotional issue. Therefore, the first set of skills described below are those which will enable chairpersons to handle emotion-laden situations.

Next, skills are described which enable chairpersons to handle the flow of information that emerges during the meeting. If these skills aren't used, especially when an information overload occurs, information is lost and participants eventually become lost.

Throughout the meeting, the chairperson manages the group through cooperative techniques, yet still maintains control through "ground rules." Ground rules provide control and a structure which guarantees freedom of expression for all.

For example, assume that one of the topics on your agenda is a problem that needs to be solved by the committee. Further, assume that you have decided to try to reach a consensus decision.

First, you would want to state the "ground rules" for consensus problem-solving and decision-making (page B-3 contains a suggested way of stating them) and remind everyone of their roles and responsibilities (page B-4 contains such a list). Then you would state the problem as you see it (after making use of the six principles found in Section A). The next step would be to check-out group members' reactions to both the ground rules (e.g., "Are they OK?") and the tentative problem-statement (e.g., "Is this a problem that we should resolve?").

Before addressing these techniques, however, it should be noted that they work best when the following conditions are met.

CONDITIONS WHICH FACILITATE GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. <u>When the number of participants is less than 15; the optimal group size being 5-7 people</u>.

2. <u>When participants can easily see and hear each other</u>. Typcially, this means that they sit in a circle or in a horseshoe-shaped configuration where a flipchart or chalkboard is at the open end.

3. When the goal or purpose of the meeting is clearly stated. For example: where a problem has no straightforward known solution and where each participant has information to contribute.

4. When an agenda is agreed upon. (see Section A)

5. When "ground rules" or procedures for conducting the problem-solving have been agreed upon and are enforced. (see page B-3 and Section C)

6. When roles and responsibilities are clearly stated. (see page B-4)

7. When the chairperson assumes a task-facilitative role rather than an expert or authoritative role. To elicit participation and to avoid dominance, the chairperson must behave, generally, in a non-evaluative way and accept whatever ideas or opinions group members suggest. Whenever a leader evaluates or criticizes group members, openly disagrees with their ideas, or expresses strong skepticism about their opinions, he/she may unwittingly cause them to be cautious about what they say. Instead of expressing their own ideas, they begin to defer more and more to the leader's opinions, even when he/she says that he/she wants them to do just the opposite.

   Adopting a task-facilitative role means that you are:

   (a) willing to accept and explore group members' ideas and feelings even though you may not agree with them,

   (b) willing to allow group members to participate fully and to develop their ideas even if it means that all of the planned agenda may not be covered, and,

   (c) willing to tolerate a mode of interaction in which the group rewards and motivates participation and controls the pace, and to some extent the content, of the meeting.

Examples:

Imagine yourself as a newspaper reporter who is interviewing someone. In assuming such a role, you would naturally be less inclined to express your own views and more inclined to ask questions that stimulate open expression. Your mental set would be to elicit and collect all the relevant information possible. You would be less inclined to evaluate, disagree, or enter into an argument; that sort of behavior would only close up your contact; he/she would feel threatened.

Or consider the television role played by Peter Falk in "Colombo." His behavior as a "dumb" or "naive" detective rarely threatens his suspects; they begin to trust him and tell him everything he needs to know.

Non-Examples:

Many work group leaders rely heavily on "non-acceptance" language which turns people off and makes them feel resentful, defensive, or inferior.

For Example:

Threatening	- "You better have some good ideas." (Or else!)
Preaching	- "You shouldn't think that way... shape up!"
Judging	- "Your ideas won't work."
Labeling	- "You're just lazy aren't you?"
Agreeing	- "You're correct." (Even though the data refute that person's point of view)
Supporting	- "We've all felt like that." (As if such a statement is sufficient)
Interrogating	- "Haven't you any facts to support your opinion?!"

PARTICIPATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING "GROUND RULES"

When a problem or conflict arises during a meeting, state the following "ground rules" for consensus problem-solving. By stating "ground rules" before you begin to problem-solve, you are alerting group members to the fact that the problem-solving will be participative and that it will be carried out by following a sequence of steps. Of course, as you and your committee gain experience from repeated use of these "ground rules", they needn't be stated each time. A summary statement like this may be sufficient:

> "I've decided to use participative problem-solving to solve the question I've just raised. Before we proceed, however, let me review the problem-solving steps for you:
>
> 1. Fact-Finding--to gather all the facts about the "problem situation"--to avoid jumping to conclusions.
>
> 2. Problem-Finding--to pinpoint the best or most promising problem to attack. Remember, no solutions or evaluation will be allowed during these first two steps. If ideas or criteria pop up in your mind, jot them down and get back with us.
>
> 3. Idea-Finding--to generate as many "creative" ideas or solutions as possible. No evaluation allowed at this time.
>
> 4. Solution-Finding--to evaluate the ideas and find the best one or integration/combination. Consensus will be our goal at this point.
>
> 5. Acceptance-Finding--to outline a plan of action to gain acceptance and to achieve implementation of our decision.
>
> Is this procedure acceptable to you? (pause) If so, then let's first determine how much time we have to problem-solve."

IF THERE ARE NO MORE QUESTIONS...
I...UH...
...WE'LL WRAP THINGS UP FOR TODAY...
THANK YOU, MEN
I...
I'M JUST NO GOOD AT MEETINGS! FOUR OF MY BEST INTERRUPTIONS WERE INTERRUPTED
WORK WALKER
3-21

GENERAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEADERS AND MEMBERS WHEN INVOLVED IN PARTICIPATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING

When one is about to begin participative problem-solving with a group of people, it is always best to let them know exactly what behavior they can expect from you and what behavior you expect from them. By stating such roles and responsibilities, especially in the beginning, confusion, surprises and fears are minimized.

"My role and responsibility as group leader (behavior you have a right to expect) includes:

- Accepting all ideas, especially unusual/innovative ones.
- Rephrasing or summarizing ideas; posting them for all to see.
- Verifying my understanding of these ideas.
- Gatekeeping the flow of ideas; being a "traffic cop".
- Allowing, perhaps even instigating, disagreement over ideas, but not personal attacks on idea generator.
- Reinforcing behavior of group members which contributes to better problem-solving steps.
- Following and enforcing a systematic step-by-step approach to problem-solving.

"Your role and responsibilities as group members (behavior I have a right to expect), include:

- Being honest, open, and forceful in stating your ideas.
- Accepting others' ideas or disagreements as ideas to be explored, not personal attacks. Look for positive side.
- Asking for clarification when you do not understand what has been said.
- Avoiding getting into an "I win, you lose" situation. Present your point clearly and logically, but listen carefully to others' points.
- Reinforcing behavior of others which contributes to problem-solving; ignoring behavior which does not.
- Assist the chairperson by helping to apply and enforce the "ground rules" of participative problem-solving.

HANDLING EMOTION-LADEN SITUATIONS

Emotion-laden situations arise from a variety of sources, particularly those in which group members feel they are being evaluated. People also react to such situations in different ways. Reactions may be hidden or overt, defensive ("don't blame me"), or show up in the form of withdrawal or attacks on others. The most common emotion-laden situations are those in which group members: (1) hide their emotions and feelings, (2) intensely express or display their emotions, or (3) attack the chairperson.

HIDDEN EXPRESSIONS OF EMOTION

Situation #1

Sometimes chairpersons (or group members) pose problems, ask questions, or introduce opinions which generate feelings of anger, hostility or threat and no response occurs. Members are afraid to reveal their real feelings; they may recall being criticized for doing so in the past. To handle this:

Skill #1 - Tolerate Silence

By being silent and using nonverbal signals, you "force" participants to begin talking. Once one starts, others will soon follow.

In general, whenever questions are asked, tolerate silence; participants are thinking. Thinking takes time.

If you suspect that participants might have misunderstood the question or problem, repeat it. If you suspect that something else is behind the silence, inquire.

Example:

A chairperson asks what should be done about members arriving late. (He/she doesn't realize that this norm has been established because he has been starting meetings late. Each member is reluctant to state this fact.)

Sensing that the silence signifies a reluctance to speak, the chairperson posts the issue on the board, takes a piece of chalk in his hand and indicates he is ready to write. He looks directly at the participants, moves closer, coaxes them with his hands and waits.

Due to his tolerance of silence, Sue finally says, "We ought to start meetings on time." A discussion follows.

Suppose the chairperson had received no response from Sue. He might repeat the issue. If still no one speaks, after a long pause, he inquires, "Could someone tell me why there is so much silence?"....

Situation #2

Group members often reveal their hidden feelings with quick, but guarded, verbal expressions or with nonverbal behavior. Allowing these "loaded" or "hidden" expressions to go by unrecognized, leads to misinterpretations, false conclusions. To avoid such consequences:

Skill #2 - Inquire (politely) into the feelings behind the guarded expressions.

Example:

After a change in procedure is announced, one participant says, "Oh, no!" and looks up at the ceiling.

The chairperson might respond by saying "Correct me if I'm wrong, but I sense that you are concerned about this change. Could you share this concern with us? I'd like to understand how you feel about it"...(silence)

If you know group members well, any behavior which deviates from normal may be regarded as a guarded expression. For example, folded arms may indicate disagreement. Non-verbal behavior, however, must be checked, (e.g., the individual with folded arms may just be cold).

Example:

"I've waited for someone to speak, much longer than normal. Would anyone please tell me what's causing this group to behave so differently than usual?

Once group members begin to express their emotions, you must be careful to display the right amount of acceptance behavior. The three skills below can usually be used in sequence to reduce emotion from a high level to a rational level.

ACTIVE EXPRESSION OF EMOTION

Situation #3

Several individuals are actively displaying emotional displeasure or are talking rapidly:

Skill #3 - Hear Out Their Views by Saying Nothing

Saying nothing is one way of demonstrating "acceptance"--just the fact that you are listening in a non-verbal way demonstrates "acceptance."

When group members are obviously very emotional and argumentative, any hint of evaluation may elicit increased defensive behavior or attacks on you.

Examples:

Attend to the individuals; maintain eye contact; lean forward.

Also, you might say "um hum" or nod your head up and down to indicate that you are listening.

Situation #4

When they begin to reduce their emotion, slow down, are hesitating or pause:

Skill #4 - Invite Further Expression of Emotion

This behavior keeps the "door open." It encourages more sharing of ideas or feelings and demonstrates, again, a nonevaluative stance.

At this time, you might appear to be slightly bewildered (Colombo!), thereby indicating that you may have failed to understand and want to be corrected.

Examples:

One might say:

"I'm interested in your point of view." (I'd like to know how you feel.)

"I'm not sure I understand--could you tell me more?" (suggestion)

"I'm learning something new from you. This is news to me."

This technique should not be overplayed, however. It's most useful when dealing with what appear to be inconsistent statements. You must be careful not to contradict or "cross-examine" in any way.

Situation #5

When their emotion eventually calms down to the point where it seems safe to say something to prove you are listening--take a "stab" and:

Skill #4 - Reflect or Feed Back, in your own words, what you think are the feelings behind what they have said--and then ask for verification of the accuracy of your statement.

When feeding back expressions of feeling, you must be careful not to just mirror or "parrot" back identical words.

We all recognize the strong feelings of others, at least at a gut level, but it's rare for most of us to verbalize them or to clarify them. It's not really difficult, however. All you have to do is take a "stab" at what you think the feelings are that lie behind the message. And it doesn't really matter if you are wrong in your probe--just as long as you ask for verification--and get it.

Although most of us feedback feelings far too little, it is possible to do it too much. First, you will sound suspicious after awhile. Second, you can't reveal your own ideas if you're constantly feeding back others' ideas and feelings.

Non-Examples:

"Tell me more!" (command)

Cut in or interrupt with questions like, "Why are you so angry?" (interrogative)

"I understand." (impossible, unless checked out)

Example:

An individual says: "I'm really fed up with your trying to get us to change our opinions!"

Possible feedback and verification of this feeling might be:

(a) "You feel angry every time you are asked to reconsider your opinions."(?) (The question mark implies you are asking for verification.)

(b) "You feel that my challenging your ideas is unfair and presumptious and that makes you angry and frustrated." (?) "Is that correct?"

Note the difference between the two examples below. By making a specific probe and seeking verification (in the second example), feelings and the reasons behind the original message are brought out.

Example of Parroting:

Joe: "Sue should never have become a group discussion leader!"

Sam: "You mean leading group discussions isn't the right job for her?"

Joe: "Exactly! Group leadership is not the right job for her."

Examples of Clarifying Feelings:

Joe: "Sue should never have become a group discussion leader!"

Sam: "You mean you feel she's too easy going? Maybe even permissive?"

Therefore, only feedback feelings when group members are emotional and you realize that their emotions are interfering with rational discussion--or are leading into arguments.

When confronted by emotional individuals, it may be difficult for you to provide feedback about their feelings to them. Strong emotions usually generate defensive behavior on the part of both parties. Both of you will probably want to counter argue or attempt to defend and clarify your position before you try to understand the other person's point of view. Even if you discipline yourself to listen, you still may distort or deny parts of the message. In such cases, feeding back feelings and verifying them becomes crucial; it helps to insure that the real message gets through.

Remember, if group members' feelings aren't recognized for what they really are, they'll probably just "simmer" and come out later and be directed at you or someone else in the group.

ATTACKS ON THE CHAIRPERSON

Situation #6

Sometimes when individuals feel defensive, they lash out ("the best defense is a good offense"). Typically, their attack takes the form of a negatively "loaded" question directed toward the meeting leader:

Skill #6 - Turn the Attack into a Problem for the Group to Solve

As a consequence, neither the questioner nor the group leader is placed in a "face-saving" situation with respect to the issue. Defensiveness can be minimized.

Joe: "Oh, no. I mean she writes too slowly. We all get bored."

Sam: "Oh, I see. You think that she should let someone else lead group discussions?"

Joe: "Exactly! Group leadership is not the right job for her."

Example:

Tom: "I really don't appreciate the way you are running this meeting! It seems to me that you are only interested in Sue and Hal's input, not mine!"

Ben: "What you seem to be telling me is that this meeting would be more meaningful for you if I asked you for more input; is that right?"

Tom: "No, that's not right--now you misread my intent!"

Ben: "You're angry because I'm showing favoritism; is that correct?"

Tom: "Right! Now you understand me."

Example:

Because one individual likes structure in his life, he is uptight with what he considers to be a permissive attitude on the chairperson's part toward enforcement of the "ground rules" for conducting the meeting. He says to Joe (in an obviously hostile way): "Suppose a group member deliberately violates a 'ground rule.' Do you mean you're going to let him get away with it?"

If Joe, the group leader, answers "yes," he may appear permissive and have to defend himself, thereby slipping

If the question is of a technican nature, you might express your own ideas but not try to prove you're right (you'll slip into an "I win/You lose" argument). Instead, you should accept any disagreement, encourage others to express their opinions or feelings and summarize what is said. With high emotions present, this will do far more to influence attitude change, constructively, than will facts and opinions of an authority.

into an argument. On the other hand, if he answers "no, " he may appear to be backing down and may again slip into an argument. (He can't win it seems.)

Instead, he might say, "Let's see what the rest of you feel about that. Does anyone have a recent, specific example of a group member who has violated a rule and gotten away with it--and what were the consequences?"

EXERCISE: REFLECTING EMOTION-LADEN FEELINGS
(The Communication "Bridge" to Problem-Solving)

INSTRUCTIONS: For each expression of feeling, write an appropriate statement which reflects the meaning that was expressed and emphasizes the feelings behind it. Indicate, also, how you would have this statement verified. Remember, you needn't be correct, just take a "stab."

Example: A group member says, "I heard from one of my associates that my job is very insecure." (pause) Your reply: "you think your job is threatened (meaning)...I'll bet you're anxious (feeling) ...Is that correct?" (request for verification)

1. "As the chairperson of this committee, you've just got to do something about Sue! She just dominates the discussions! She's too assertive!"

   Your reply:

2. "You committee leaders are all alike! You never really care if some members interrupt or 'put-down' others!"

   Your reply:

3. "Damn, I just can't figure out why my contributions never seem to be adequate."

   Your reply:

4. "Hey, would you believe it; our group solution to that discrimination problem is working out OK!"

   Your reply:

5. "This meeting is a drag! When are we going to get into something that's interesting?"

   Your reply:

Possible answers are found on page B-15.

HANDLING INFORMATION-LADEN SITUATIONS

Potential problem situations arise in connection with work group meetings even when no strong emotions or feelings are experienced. These situations commonly occur in connection with: (1) handling and expediting the flow of information, (2) encouraging full participation, and (3) summarizing or closing the discussion.

HANDLING AND EXPEDITING THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

Situation #1

Participants contribute relevant and irrelevant ideas and feelings and/or related issues and problems.

Skill #1 - Post and Verify All Ideas, Opinions, Feelings, Reactions and Related Issues and Problems

Record, in your own words, as quickly and succinctly as possible, on a chalkboard or large newsprint pad, all ideas, feelings, or problems that emerge from the discussion. Abbreviations help. Whatever is written should be verified or confirmed before proceeding.

When dealing with strong feelings, it is sometimes appropriate to record feelings alongside ideas. First, however, you should check to be sure that emotion has been reduced sufficiently (see above) and that permission has been granted (people often don't like to have their feelings aired publicly).

Example:

The chairperson introduces a controversial or paradoxical set of facts and everyone wants to express an opinion or a related problem.

Example of "brainstorming":

If the chairperson desires "brainstorming" (a "free-wheeling--anything goes" format), or senses that the group is "hot" on a topic (each idea expressed seems to "cue" more ideas), then he just lists the ideas as quickly as he can, while stating that he will obtain clarification and elaboration later.

Examples:

An individual says: "We could use this time to get our work done. Why do we have to meet today?"

The chairperson asks permission to post feelings. Possible posted feedback:

(a) meeting--"bad timing--angry(?)"
(b) meetings waste time--frustrated(?)

NOTE: The six leadership skills described here are really "ground rules" which, if enforced, guarantee freedom of expression and open participation (as contrasted with "hidden agendas" and inhibited involvement). As such, before initiating their use, the chairperson should explain how they are to be used, acquire consensus for using them and ask for assistance in vigorously enforcing them. In this way, responsibility for their use is shared; the chairperson can maintain and improve the use of the skills (ground rules) through participant feedback.

Discussion of Posting

Posting, as defined here, greatly facilitates and clarifies communication.

Why?

A. When their ideas are posted, group members know they are being listened to; there is no way they can say they're not being listened to--the proof is in front of them. Further, by checking back with them, you allow them to verify that what was written is accurate (on target).

During a discussion, out of the blue, Joe blurts out, "You know the problem with these meetings is that they go on forever and we don't seem to accomplish anything.

The chairperson responds by quickly restating this complaint (in his own words) on the board: "Our meetings--too long, no results." He then asks, "Does this indicate what you wanted us to know?" Joe answers, "Yeah, that's it. You've got it." (verification)

NOTE: With new groups it sometimes pays to make a mistake on purpose and then to ask for verification--just to establish the norm that it's "ok" to correct the leader.

B. The act of posting individuals' contributions is reinforcing to them; it serves to increase their rate of participation.

Sue is pleased that her ideas are being recorded; she plans to speak up and out more often now. She feels her ideas won't be ignored or "put down" like they have in the past.

C. Posting enables the chairperson and group members to handle information overload--when there are too many ideas (7±2), generated too quickly.

At first the chairperson didn't want to run to the board, but after the fourth suggestion he knew he had to; he couldn't handle all of the information generated.

D. Posting makes a public record for use later; information is neither lost nor forgotten.

The chairperson asks, "Can we postpone resolving this issue until after we discuss our original issue?" Joe agrees, he feels that since his issue has been posted, it won't be forgotten.

E. Emotion-laden issues or concerns are often vaguely held in the mind and easily become exaggerated. When such issues are verbalized, especially publicly on a chalkboard and are restated in non-emotional, objective and clear terms, exaggerated feelings are focused and often disappear.

Amy had difficulty telling the group what she felt. She didn't know why her point of view worried her so; it kept her from concentrating on the current issue. But after it was posted, objectively, she began to realize things were not so bad after all.

F. If an individual dominates or keeps repeating his ideas over and over, he can easily be shown that he already has been heard, thereby politely shutting him off and saving time.

Al remembers when Sam used to get so excited that he would keep repeating his ideas over and over. But when the chairperson began to write them down and verify them, Sam quit his rambling.

Posting also helps the chairperson to be a better meeting leader:

A. Posting slows the chairperson down and keeps him from talking; he has to listen to be able to write. It forces him to pay attention and prevents him from dominating.

B. Posting sets a climate which suggests that the chairperson is concerned about participants' feelings and problems. Since problems, relevant or irrelevant, may arise at any time during a meeting, posting indicates that he is willing to listen and lead the group in problem-solving, if necessary.

Situation #2

Whenever an active discussion gets underway, the flow of information often exceeds the capabilities of participants. In such situations, they may cut each other off or fail to follow up on each others' contributions.

Skill #2 - Gatekeep the Flow of Information

Posting helps to slow down the flow of information and to structure it, but you also need to perform the function of a disciplinarian--who gives a green light to one member to speak while you "hold up" others until you have checked to make sure that you have accurately and completely recorded what the first person has expressed, have verified it and have allowed time for others to add to it.

If this function is not performed:
(a) good ideas are sometimes lost forever,
(b) individuals are cut off in mid-sentence (thereby irritating them), or worse,
(c) group members start talking among themselves about other issues.

Al also remembers that before the chairperson began posting ideas, he would always get into arguments--mainly because he kept interrupting and misinterpreting what was said.

Now Al feels that the chairperson listens real well and, in contrast, leads the group in problem-solving discussions whenever problems or frustrations arise.

Example:

Joe is explaining one of his ideas and Sam "cuts in" to offer another idea. Before Sam gets a few words out, the chairperson "cuts in" to state: "Could you hold that for a few minutes? We're still working on Joe's suggestion. But, hang on to it--write it down--I'll get back to you. I don't want to lose your idea either."

Joe is pleased to have the group leader act as a "traffic cop." In the past it seemed that every time he presented an idea, someone would always jump in with their own idea. This not only made Joe angry, but it also meant that Joe would have to bring the idea up again later, if it wasn't forgotten and lost in the meanwhile. He's convinced that hearing everyone out first saves time in the long run and keeps the group focused.

The intent of "gatekeeping" is to accept all ideas, opinions, feelings, problems, etc., as quickly, expeditiously and efficiently as possible without losing ideas or irritating anyone.

Ideas or problems that are irrelevant to the central theme of the discussion can be postponed by recording them in the corner of the board, with the pledge that they will be dealt with later.

Although you should decide quickly whether or not to put "irrelevant" ideas on a "hold" list, it is important that the originator's acceptance of such an act be obtained before doing so--his/her ideas may really be pertinent to the topic at hand.

ENCOURAGING FULL PARTICIPATION

Situation #3

Individuals attempt to express themselves with incomplete or vague statements.

Skill #3 - Request Examples or Illustrations

When group members express incomplete or vague ideas, you should ask them to elaborate with specific examples or illustrations.

Such questions should encourage expression; questions that suggest cross-examination or evaluation can be threatening and cause answers to become brief and guarded.

If you think that you understand, you might make a tentative "stab" and test out if your understanding is correct. Or, you might check with others to see if they would like to take a "stab" at checking out their understanding or if they would like to elaborate on or clarify what's been said.

Sam says, "I just wanted to point out that parking is getting to be a real problem."

The chairperson responds with, "That problem is tangential to our discussion, but it sounds like a problem that bears discussion. Is it okay if I jot down 'parking' under our list of 'other problems' and proceed with our discussion?"

Sam responds with, "Okay for now, but we've got to solve that parking problem soon!"

Example:

An individual seems to have something to offer but the chairperson doesn't understand what it is. He might say:

"I'm not sure I understand what you said. Could you give me an example?"
"How do you mean that?"
"Can you elaborate on that?"
"Let me see if I'm understanding what you're saying...."

Non-Examples ("cross-examination")

"Why do you say that?"
"Where's your evidence"
"How do you know?"

Examples:

"Can anyone state in their own words what they understand is being said?" (Use nonverbal coaxing to elicit contributions.)

Here, as elsewhere, you should not call on those who are quiet. If you do, you may threaten those who have nothing worthwhile to contribute. Rather than listening to the ongoing discussion, they will become overly concerned about coming up with "good" responses.

Situation #4

Group members are reluctant to contribute to the discussion (for a variety of reasons).

Skill #4 - Encourage and Recognize "Any" Contributions by finding something "good" in them, by restating them in your own words, by posting and adding to them and by asking others to add to them.

Verbal recognition of individuals' initial contributions, if positively stated, usually causes them to participate more often. Verbal recognition can be used whenever the opportunity arises: (a) when nonverbal behavior (such as half-raised hand) indicates a readiness to respond, (b) when a hesitant first attempt occurs, or (c) when an individual adds an idea or example to someone else's contribution.

With a new group, recognizing "good" in every contribution helps to get ideas out of everyone. But with ongoing groups, reinforce only acts of contributing, unless you can remember to reinforce all ideas contributed. Why? By reinforcing only some ideas, other ideas are not reinforced. Those whose ideas are not reinforced will feel that they are somehow not as worthwhile. You can not afford to be evaluative (even positively). You should remain nonevaluative and accepting until an appropriate time for evaluation eventually occurs.

"Can someone elaborate or give us some examples, so that we can be sure we understand?"

Example:

After discussing the situation with Joe, the chairperson discovers that Joe has good ideas to contribute to the discussion, but is afraid to express them aloud (in the past some of his ideas have been laughed at by others and he has been embarrassed).

So, instead of "forcing" contributions, which only generates defensive reactions or fear, he:

First, waits until Joe makes any first, small attempt at contributing, or uses nonverbal means (e.g., a coaxing gesture with his hands) to elicit contributions from Joe.

Then he recognizes Joe's contributions by saying something like, "Joe, I'm pleased to hear your ideas. Keep it up. I like everyone to contribute."

Finally, he posts Joe's example on the board and adds to it or asks others to add to it.

Non-Examples (forcing and over-recognizing contributions):

"Joe, what do you think of Mary's idea?"

Joe mumbles something that is really not very meaningful. (He was put on the spot.)

"That's a great idea Joe; you really are doing a good job!" (This response probably embarrasses Joe and makes others wonder why their ideas weren't similarly recognized.)

Not only is recognition useful in getting shy or reluctant members to contribute, it is also useful when they contribute "half-baked" ideas--ones that just spontaneously "popped" into their heads. If you accept such contributions by posting them and recognize them further with some words of encouragement, you may cause others to build or "piggyback" on the contributions and turn them (by synthesis of ideas) into really innovative results.

Example:

Ted suddenly throws out a tentative, partially thought out idea. Instead of saying something like: "Can't you be more clear about what you're talking about?" or "Does anyone else have a better idea?", the chairperson says: "I'm glad you brought that idea up. It seems to be different from the rest. Let's see if it will get the rest of us thinking. Let's free associate. What does it cause you to think of?"

Possible answers to "Exercise: Reflecting Emotion-Laden Feelings."

1. "It sounds like you're really upset with Sue (feeling).... You feel she hogs the floor (meaning).... Am I hearing you correctly?" (request for verification)

2. "Correct me if I'm wrong (request for verification)... but I get that you think I'm allowing some members to take advantage of others (meaning)... and this is causing you to be angry with my leadership?" (feeling)

3. "You sense that your ideas are inadequate (meaning)... and you're not sure why (feeling)... is that right?" (request for verification)

4. "You're really happy that things are going well, especially after you have your doubts (feeling & meaning)... is that what you seem to be saying?" (request for verification)

5. "You're bored with our agenda, right?" (meaning, feeling and request for verification)

"Now that we're all good and mad, let's take another crack at Item Three."

DRAWING BY ETON: ©1979 The New Yorker Magazine Inc

DECIDING TO MOVE THE DISCUSSION ON AND SUMMARIZING OR CLOSING THE DISCUSSION

Situation #5

Group members seem to have voiced all of their opinions, ideas or solutions.

Skill #5 - Consensus-test repeatedly until all participants are willing to go ahead to the next step in the discussion or problem-solving sequence.

To make certain that all members are really ready, you should encourage everyone to express their opinions. Consensus-testing is not asking group members to vote; it means seeing that each and every member is sufficiently satisfied to proceed and has had enough time to be sure.

Example:

Group members seem to have voiced all of their objections to a proposed change in the current ground rules for running work group meetings. The chairperson might say, "Has everyone expressed their thoughts on this issue?" "Are we ready to summarize what's been said?" "Take your time--I want to make sure we have exhausted all of our objections to the change."

Situation #6

Discussion begins to drift to other topics or closure is felt.

Skill #6 - Summarize What Has Been Said and Ask for Verification

People who participate in meetings usually want evidence that their time and energy have been spent productively. Summaries also provide closure to what has been expressed.

In any discussion, breaks in the flow of information offer natural occasions for summarizing. Of course, if ideas and problems have been posted, summarizing is easy; you merely review what has been written down and obtain verification that it does, in fact, describe accurately what has been said.

Several summary-oriented functions that can be performed are:

(a) combine two or more ideas
(b) identify a problem from a number of examples or incidents
(c) separate a series of ideas into two or more problems or issues.

Example:

During a discussion of a topic, several ideas/feelings not associated with the topic seem to have been captured on the board. This "hidden agenda" reads:

"group is apathetic"
"our goals unclear"
"where are we headed?"

The group leader realizes that he ought to try and summarize these feelings and identify the underlying problem. So he says:

"It seems that a problem underlies our discussion today. Let me take a stab at identifying it: 'How can we state our goals so that they are clear and will elicit commitment to our problem-solving?'....Is that correct?"

Example:

"You've all helped to resolve some bothersome problems. I plan to go ahead with our plans as agreed upon. I'd like to thank you for your time and energy."

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK*

1. *Descriptive* rather than evaluative. Descriptions, limited to what was said and done, or how, avoid false inferences and assumptions about motive or intent. Further by avoiding evaluative language, we avoid having the recipient react defensively (e.g., "I didn't do that!")

2. *Specific* rather than general. To be told that one is "dominating" is not as useful as being told that "in the discussion that just took place, you did not appear to be listening to what others were saying, and I felt forced to accept your arguments."

3. Focuses on *behavior* rather than on personality. It is important to focus on what a person does rather than on what we think or imagine he is. Thus we might say that a person "talked more than anyone else in this meeting" rather than that he is a "loud-mouth." The former allows for the possibility of change; the latter implies a fixed personality trait.

4. Involves *sharing of information*, rather than giving advice. By sharing information, we leave a person free to decide for himself, in accordance with his own goals and needs. When we give advice, we tell another what to do (we take away some of his freedom to decide for himself) and we "put him down" (we suggest that he isn't bright enough to come up with his own solution).

5. *Well-timed*. In general, feedback should be given at the earliest opportunity. This rule depends, of course, on the recipient's readiness to hear it; feedback presented at an inappropriate time may do more harm than good.

6. Limits the *amount of information* to how much the recipient *can use* rather than the amount we would like to give. To overload a person with feedback is to reduce the probability that he will be able to use any that he receives. When we give more than can be used, we are more often than not satisfying some need of our own rather than helping the other person. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only our own needs and fails to consider the needs of the person on the receiving end. Too often we give feedback because it makes us feel better or to give ourselves a psychological advantage.

7. Directed toward *behavior which the receiver can do something about*. Frustration is only increased when a person is reminded of some shortcoming over which he has no control (e.g., stuttering).

8. *Solicited* rather than imposed. Feedback is most useful when the recipient actively seeks feedback or has asked observers to answer specific questions for him.

9. *Verified or checked by the recipient*. The recipient should try to rephrase the feedback he is receiving to see if it corresponds to what the sender has in mind. No matter what the intent, feedback is often threatening and thus subject to considerable distortion or misinterpretation.

10. *Verified or checked to determine degree of agreement from others*. When feedback is given in the presence of other people, both giver and receiver have an opportunity to check with others in the group about the accuracy of the feedback. Is this one person's impression shared by others? Such "consensual validation" is of value to both sender and receiver.

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*Adapted from A Handbook for Faculty Development by William H. Bergquist and Steven R. Phillips. The Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges in association with the College Center of the Finger Lakes, Washington, D.C., pp. 224-25.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

1. DESCRIBES THE SITUATION (RATHER THAN EVALUATES)

2. FOCUSES ON SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR

3. INCLUDES DIRECT EXPRESSION OF FEELING

4. DESCRIBES THE CONSEQUENCES

5. TIMELY

POSSIBLE FORMAT:

"DURING _____ (DESCRIPTION)
WHEN YOU _____ (SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR)
I FELT _____ (EMOTION)
AND AS A RESULT _____ (CONSEQUENCE)."

A. THE MESSAGE SHOULD CONTAIN NEITHER A "PUT-DOWN" NOR A "SOLUTION" (LET THE PERSON DECIDE WHAT TO DO).

B. THE EMOTION MUST BE REAL (NOT MADE UP): IT SHOULD BE THE CAUSE OF YOUR INITIAL EVALUATIVE MESSAGE.

C. THE CONSEQUENCES MUST BE TANGIBLE (E.G., IN TERMS OF HOW IT FACILITATED OR HINDERED YOU).

OBSERVER CHECKLIST

TWELVE BASIC GROUP LEADERSHIP SKILLS

As an observer during Mini-Problems, use this checklist to identify both "group member" behavior and the "chairperson's" use of appropriate behavioral skills to handle it.

EMOTION-LADEN SITUATIONS

If group members:	Then the group leader should:
1. Are silent	1. Tolerate silence
2. Exhibit guarded expressions	2. Make inquiry/probe
3. Display much emotion	3. Hear out
4. Display less emotion	4. Invite expression of emotion
5. Express emotion, but at a rational level	5. Feed back expression of emotion and verify (post).
6. Dispute/oppose/attack the group leader or members with "loaded" questions	6. Turn "loaded" questions into problems

EMOTION-FREE SITUATIONS

If group members:	Then the group leader should:
1. Contribute relevant or irrelevant ideas/feelings/issues/problems	1. Post ideas/feelings/issues/problems and verify
2. "Cut-in" on each other	2. Gatekeep
3. Make vague or incomplete statements	3. Request examples or illustrations; check with others
4. Hesitate to contribute	4. Recognize initial contributions
5. Appear to have exhausted their contributions	5. Consensus-test
6. Come to the end of a part of the discussion	6. Summarize

SECTION C

FACILITATING PROBLEM-SOLVING

Typical Obstacles to Using Participative Problem-Solving (PPS) Steps

Avoiding Problem-Solving Traps

Step 1: Fact-Finding (Analyzing the Situation)

Step 2: Problem-Finding (Generating Hypotheses)

Step 3: Idea-Finding (Brainstorming Possibilities)

Step 4: Solution-Finding (Evaluating Alternatives)

Step 5: Acceptance-Finding (Action Planning)

FACILITATING PROBLEM-SOLVING

Most faculty perform well as individual problem-solvers, but when they attempt to lead others in group problem-solving and decision-making, they often run into difficulty. There are three general reasons:

1. Humans typically don't think linearly; they tend to quickly jump from one idea or step to another. (Especially to solutions or evaluation of them.)

2. Humans have egos; they tend to offer their ideas and then to fight for them, especially if <u>they</u> are "criticized."

3. Humans are quick to evaluate ideas; faculty, especially, have a natural tendency to be convergent in their thinking and evaluative rather than divergent and tolerant of "creative" ideas.

The techniques and procedures covered in this section will not only enable committee chairpersons to handle these human tendencies but will also provide a systematic structure for eliciting and implementing creative decisions. There are other possible approaches, but the important point to be addressed is this:

> Committee leaders and members need a clear idea of how they will operate (what steps will be taken) to reach a decision.

Uncertainty, by definition, exists during problem-solving and decision-making. Since many of the techniques described below provide ways of reducing uncertainty, they typically are readily acceptable to group members.

However, since they also require that you structure the discussion, participants may view your efforts to be systematic and facilitative as a subtle form of manipulation. If you try to justify your actions, you may find yourself on the defensive. Instead, you might:

(a) outline the procedures (steps) to be used before proceeding, perhaps even getting the group to <u>decide</u> that the procedures are OK before they are used;

(b) <u>train</u> participants in how to use them; and/or

(c) ask them to experience the procedures on a trial/experimental basis and point out their beneficial results during feedback.

TYPICAL OBSTACLES IN USING PARTICIPATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING (PPS) STEPS

No matter how well the procedures (steps) of participative problem-solving are followed, people have a natural tendency to limit its effectiveness. Described below are five obstacles that typically occur when a group of individuals sit down to problem-solve. Skills for handling each are suggested. (Note: These skills complement those found in Section B.)

Handling the Natural Tendency to "Jump" Around

Obstacle #1 Participants jump from one problem to another--in such a way that more than one problem or objective is under consideration at the same time.

Example: You present a "problem" statement. This cues another person to suggest a second "problem," while a third is being considered by two individuals who are talking to each other. Everyone in the group is confused, the agenda is disregarded; there is no single focus of attention.

Skill #1: After posting and clarifying problems or objectives, ask the group to rank them in order of priority, according to some criterion such as importance, deadlines, or likelihood of obtaining a solution within the time available. Then, focus on one item at a time.

Obstacle #2 Participants prematurely jump from one PPS step to another--in such a way that the PPS sequence is short-circuited by superficial analysis.

Example: You ask if the group is ready to list facts about the first "problem" listed. Instead, a solution is suggested by Sam. It is immediately evaluated by two other group members. Sue then suggests that another "better" solution be tried out "without any further analysis." Everyone is confused.

Skill #2: Separate the PPS steps, especially idea-finding from solution-finding.

Example: As facts about a "problem" are being posted, several solutions spontaneously pop out. Instead of disallowing them, you note them under a heading entitled "solutions" and remind the group of the "ground rules"--that the focus should be on one PPS step at a time, in this case fact-finding; solution-finding and evaluation will be deferred until later.

Research has shown that groups which achieve creative solutions: a) spend proportionately more time in problem-finding than other groups and b) separate the activities associated with problem-finding and analysis from those associated with idea-finding and evaluation behavior. Such a practice assures that the problem definition does not contain solutions, thereby restricting creative idea-generation and that evaluation does not stifle creative or innovative ideas.

However, to avoid cutting off discussion, sort contributions into categories such as:

- Facts
- Problem Statements
- Ideas or Solutions
- Criteria for Judging
- Other Problems

Further, if group members are to prevent confusion and wasted time from trying to solve superficial or "wrong" problems, they have to agree on a common process (step) and stick to it until all agree to proceed to the next PPS step.

and jot down under the appropriate heading, a key word to represent or to "hold in memory" each contribution.

Handling Conflicts, Put-Downs and Arguments

Obstacle #3 People in conflict typically offer solutions which only meet their own needs. A "win/lose" argument results.

Skill #3: Redefine conflicts between participants in terms of their needs, rather than their opposing solutions.

Needs are often confused with solutions. Buying a new car is a solution; the need may be "transportation," "status" or "save gas." Meeting needs is usually possible, but implementing particular solutions may be impossible.

When people enter into a potentially conflictive situation, it is not uncommon for them to have one or two premature solutions as stated objectives and the issue becomes one of supporting or not supporting each of them. In still other cases an abstract objective such as "good communication," which has little specific meaning, will be stated.

In all such cases it is essential to elicit specific needs or desires by asking participants to define specifically what they wish to accomplish with their proposed solutions or abstract objectives. This process may have to be repeated several times until a problem is defined which leads itself to a variety of solutions.

Such conflicts occur because people are typically solution-minded rather than problem-minded. Since this tendency occurs quite frequently, chairpersons must immediately take charge to get members to back-up and clarify what their problem is.

If this isn't done, it is not uncommon for the focus of the discussion to be broadened from a specific disagreement to a generalized hostility.

Example: Suppose two faculty members both want the only available Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). Typically, each thinks in terms of competing solutions. (I've got to have her."--"No you don't, I need her more.")

However, if basic needs are specified first, these solutions are seen as premature and self-serving. Basic needs might be: 1) a GTA to help correct exams, 2) a GTA to handle a recitation section six times during the term. Obviously, both faculty may be able to meet their needs by sharing the GTA. But without redefinition of the problem in terms of needs, a "win/lose" situation results.

Nonetheless, a "lose/lose" compromise may result unless sufficient time is taken to fully explore needs. For example, one individual might suggest "I'll take the GTA for five weeks, you can have her for the other five weeks." Although this solution may look good on the surface, such quick compromise agreements usually wind up with both parties losing something. A creative solution would meet the basic needs of both individuals, at least cost to each.

Procedure:

a) Ask each person "what do you hope to achieve with that solution?"

b) Record their responses--to redirect their attention away from the argument and toward ways of achieving their needs.

c) Ask all to brainstorm ways to achieve their needs.

Obstacle #4 Individuals state problems or evaluate solutions in a manner which "put down" or blame others.

Skill #4: Depersonalize "put-downs" by restating them in situational terms rather than behavioral terms. Instead of implying blame of some individual (and generating defensive reactions) the "problem" now becomes the target to be defeated.

Example: Instead of allowing someone to say "I work too hard, you people have got to start pulling your load," the problem statement should be restated as: "Why do some of us feel that we are overloaded?" "What are the facts?"

Note: Resistance and resentment are elicited when individuals try to impose their personal points of view or perception of the facts. In contrast, "situational" facts are generally accepted, especially if they have been obtained in a coordinated fact-gathering manner (i.e., the facts are analyzed and interpreted by group members through open discussion instead of each member analyzing and interpreting facts in terms of their own experiences).

Example: One member says to another, "You clod, that's the most stupid idea I've ever heard--the results will be disasterous!"

This can be restated by saying, "Bill, you obviously have an objection to Joe's suggestion, but I wish you'd keep to the issues, not 'put-downs'.

Now, Bill, what are the facts about the general situation as you see it?"

Obstacle #5 Group members have gotten into an emotion-laden argument.

Skill #5 :

A. Stop the interaction and ask each to restate in their own words what they think the other person has said and felt.

In this way, the leader is requiring group members to actively listen to each other. Minority opinions are also "protected" and recognized (which serves to minimize status differences).

Example: Joe and Sue are in an argument over a sexist remark Joe made. Joe has gotten defensive and Sue shows signs too--both have begun to make personal attacks.

After you request them to restate each others' positions, you notice that their emotional and defensive behavior dimishes--rational discussion and an apology follow.

B. Turn disagreement into alternative ideas or criteria. Objections to any ideas presented should be channeled into constructive use by: 1) turning the objection into a "springboard" to elicit opposite ideas or solutions, and 2) turning the objection into a criterion for use in evaluation later on.

Example: Joe responds to an idea from Jack with "That'll cost too much money!" The group leader calmly says "Joe, you know we aren't supposed to be evaluating each others' ideas, but since you brought up money, does it give you an idea that won't cost money--something just the opposite of Jack's idea? Also, while you're thinking, I'll post "money under the heading: "Criteria for Evaluation".

Exercise

Of the techniques listed, check (✓) those which the group leader can use to overcome typical obstacles to participative problem-solving.

_____ 1. If group members get into an argument, tell them to calm down.

_____ 2. Allow group members to "put-down" each other because disagreement often leads to creative ideas.

_____ 3. Ask participants to re-define their "solution" in terms of their needs.

_____ 4. Allow the group to evaluate each proposed solution as soon as it is given.

_____ 5. Turn objections to any proposed solution into a lecture on the "ground rules": "No evaluation allowed!"

_____ 6. If a solution has been proposed and the group seems to agree that it's "terrific", increase pressure to get another solution.

_____ 7. Rank order the "problems" identified so that the most important one can be considered by itself.

_____ 8. Allow group members to suggest solutions even though the group is at the problem-finding stage.

Suggested Solutions:

1, 2 & 4 are "no-nos"; 5 & 8 are not quite right as stated; 3, 6 & 7 are OK.

AVOIDING PROBLEM-SOLVING TRAPS

The problem-solving steps to be presented below are derived from the scientific method, where one first trys to understand a problem, develops hypotheses about what caused it, tests the hypotheses and finally evaluates the results of the tests.

This sequence of steps is well-known--but most groups fail to follow them. Why? Mostly because of these problem-solving traps:

1. We assume, too quickly, that we know what the problem is.	Often we only see symptoms of a problem, not the real problem. Then we spend lots of time and energy solving the wrong problem.
2. We fail to consider the overall end result.	Careful analysis of the problem situation in terms of overall goals or objectives can help to pinpoint the difference between a symptom and the real problem.
3. We limit solutions to the first or second ones that come to mind.	We have a tendency to grab on to and run with whatever pops into our mind without bothering to take the time to think of alternatives.
4. We tend to quickly accept the first solution that seems to have support.	Apparent acceptance of an idea can overshadow concerns for quality or the consequences of proposed actions.
5. We assume that once a decision is made, it will be simple to implement.	We often avoid the work of thinking through a step-by-step plan of action.

Each of these problem-solving traps can be avoided by initiating and completing five problem-solving steps.

Problem-Solving Steps

1. Begin with Fact-Finding, ...to systematically flesh out the "problem situation" as you initially sensed it...by gathering all the factual information that you can about it...to help locate the real problem.

2. Then, start Problem-Finding, ...write down as many problem statements as you can, ...defining and redefining your perplexing situation, ...to help pinpoint your real objective.

3. Select the problem statement that seems most promising and begin Idea-Finding, ...by thinking of as many ideas or alternatives as you can to solve the problem...to help you discover the best or most creative solution.

4. Initiate Solution-Finding, ...select the most useful ideas...by determining the most appropriate evaluative criteria and then systematically rating each idea by the criteria selected.

5. Finally, for each usable idea you select, proceed with Acceptance-Finding...gaining acceptance for and otherwise implementing your selected ideas.

Each step will be clarified and elaborated on in detail below. Before getting involved in the details, several general rules need to be stated.

General Rules for Using the Steps

1. Begin each step by piling up alternatives or possibilities. Stress "brainstorming", "imaginative" or divergent thinking to elicit creativity. "Defer judgment" is the key at the start of each step.

2. End each step by evaluating or screening the ideas, alternatives or possibilities that have been generated. Stress "judicial" or convergent thinking--to reduce the number of ideas to a manageable number.

3. Obtain consensus to proceed at the conclusion of each step. Since the overall goal is to achieve a consensus decision through cooperative effort, each step also needs to be checked for consensus before proceeding. Note: silence does not mean agreement.

4. Back-up, recycle if it is impossible to reach consensus to proceed. If, for example, the ideas brought up in Step 3 appear to be inadequate, this suggests returning to Step 1 or Step 2 for more problem analysis.

5. Stress action. As you push for completeness of each step, avoid impatience by stressing forward movement (i.e., getting tasks accomplished).

Flow-chart of Problem-Solving Steps

The flow-chart on the next page shows how the problem-solving steps and the general rules are to be used. It is assumed, of course, that a problem statement has been prepared and stated (as suggested in Section A), the "ground rules" have been stated (as suggested in Section B), and any emotional reaction has been handled (as suggested in Section B).

Starting Point

It is assumed in the flow-chart that one starts with a "problem", (i.e., a discrepancy or gap between what exists and what is desired) and proceeds through all of the steps. Although this is generally the case, it may be more appropriate to start problem-solving at any one of the steps.

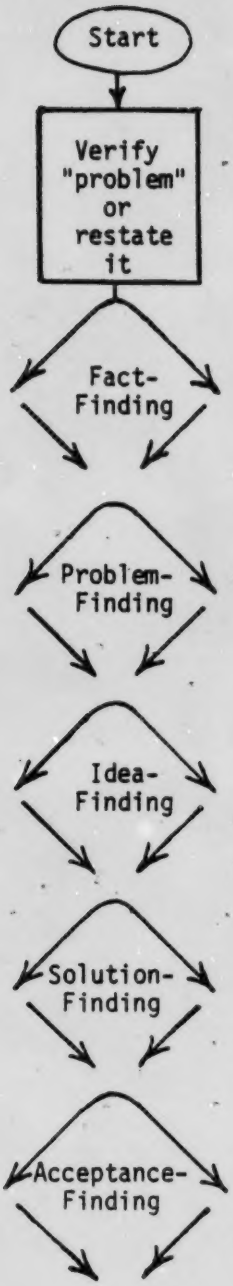
With some "problems", for example, the most important step is collecting all the relevant facts or information. After this the solution may be self-evident.

At other times, the definition of the "problem" is clear, the alternative choices are known, and what remains to be done is to choose between them.

Still another kind of "problem" occurs when a solution has been decided on; now the group is faced with the question of how to implement it successfully.

Thus, it is of value to be able to identify what kind of "problem" you are facing so you start at the appropriate step. Try the exercise on page C-9.

FLOW-CHART OF PROBLEM-SOLVING STEPS



State ground rules
State "problem"
Handle emotional reaction

Check if "problem" is OK as stated (or)
Restate "problem" from discussion

Brainstorm Facts
Consensus test

Separate Facts from Opinion
Summarize

Brainstorm Problem Statements
Consensus test

Choose One Problem Statement to Attack
Return later, if reach a deadend

Brainstorm Ideas/Solutions
Consensus test

Screen Out Obvious Non-Solutions
Summarize

Brainstorm Criteria for Evaluation
Consensus test

Evaluate Solutions by Criteria
Select a solution or combination

Brainstorm an Action Plan
Consensus test

Develop an Evaluation and Trouble-Shooting Plan
Summarize

Exercise

For each situation listed below, check the problem-solving step that is needed next. You may notice that one or more of the other steps have already been used or may need to be used later on.

	Fact-Finding	Problem-Finding	Idea-Finding	Solution-Finding	Acceptance-Finding (Action Planning)
1. Al wants to figure out how to motivate group members to participate more in his meetings. (Which problem-solving step does he need?)	___	___	___	___	___
2. Sue wants to find out why attendance at her meetings has dropped.	___	___	___	___	___
3. The group wants to set up procedures for achieving their decision.	___	___	___	___	___
4. The number of meetings has been increasing in a certain organization. Mike has been gathering the available facts to try to learn why.	___	___	___	___	___
5. Barbara must develop some way to cut operating costs in her department, since her budget has been cut by 10 percent.	___	___	___	___	___
6. A group wants to decide on which work schedule will work best for the rest of the year.	___	___	___	___	___

Suggested Answers

1. Idea-finding. Al needs to generate ways of gaining more participation.
2. Fact-finding. Sue needs to find out information that will help her explain her situation.
3. Action planning. They need to set up the stages or steps to take in order to achieve their objective (decision).
4. Problem-finding. Mike needs to determine a likely cause of the situation--a problem to solve.
5. Idea-finding. Barbara needs to originate something new--a method to cut costs.
6. Solution-finding. They need to select the best option available from those generated.

Verifying or Restating the "Problem" as a Question

Consider this emergent "problem" situation: Two members of a committee have been in conflict. Over the last six meetings they have progressively been more and more often engaged in disagreements and backbiting which only tend to disrupt and dominate the discussions. At some threshold point you would recognize that there is a sufficient discrepancy between what is normal and what is counter-productive behavior. You would be prompted to prepare a problem statement as suggested in Section A.

In general, you would be stating a question such as: "Why is there an increase in the number of disagreements?" Stating a question is easy. Simply ask: "Why does this situation exist?" (Note: it helps to indicate a difference, like "increase" or "decrease" from what is normal or desired.)

Of course, as soon as you state the "problem" as you see it, ask group members if they agree or disagree with your statement. They may view your "problem" in a much different light. They may suggest other problems (see Obstacle #1 above).

In any event, the end result of verifying and perhaps restating your "problem" should be a question to answer. This action is the gateway to problem-solving; it prepares everyone for the first step: Fact-Finding.

Note: The question "How can we prevent disagreements in the future?" is premature at this point. This is an "Idea-Finding" question and comes later after "Problem-Finding". Nor are you quite ready to ask questions such as "When do the disagreements occur?" Information-seeking questions are part of "Fact-Finding."

CAN'T WE SNEAK UP THROUGH B SECTOR AND CLOBBER THEM?
BIG CLIFF, CAN'T GET AT THEM OVER THE RIVER, EITHER
WHY DON'T WE JUST LEAVE THEM ALONE?
THE TROUBLE WITH THE ARMY IS WE'VE GOT TOO MANY CIVILIANS IN IT
6-24
MORT WALKER

STEP 1: FACT-FINDING (ANALYZING THE SITUATION)

Once you have stated the question (that is, indicated what you are trying to find out), the next step is to analyze the situation. This needs to be done before you actively look for the cause of the "problem." In other words, before you can find the reason for something that puzzles you, you must learn the facts. If you don't understand the situation, your hunches about the cause are likely to be wrong.

Further, later resistance to solutions is minimized when everyone concerned has agreed upon the facts from the beginning of problem-solving.

First, Expand Thinking

Defer judgment by asking group members to brainstorm* as many facts about the problem situation as possible.

Example: To discover what really caused group members to become increasingly "disruptive", you elicit from them concrete incidents or specific examples of events which lead to their becoming "disruptive". By going over such incidents in detail, together you begin to identify what it was, in general, that caused the "disruptive" behavior to increase. In other words, you are beginning to formulate or locate the problem from an examination of the facts.

How do you analyze a situation? You ask specific questions and accumulate specific information. You ask, "What, where, when, to what extent?" You get as specific as possible. You focus on what is (or is not) happening now, especially in comparison to what has (or has not) happened in the past.

Note: One question you do not ask at this point is "why?" You save that question for later. It doesn't do much good to ask why until you understand the facts--until you have analyzed the situation. Asking "why?" is an invitation to speculate loosely about causes--and the tendency will be to develop facts to "prove" a suspected "cause" (a hunch).

Example: Suppose a person walks into a doctor's office and says, "I feel terrible." The doctor probably would state a question like, "I wonder why this person feels terrible?...that's not natural."

For Step 1, the doctor would analyze the situation to obtain specific facts. Questions the doctor might ask are:

"What are your symptoms?"
"When did the feeling start?"
"What were you doing at that time?"
"What changes occurred at that time?"
"Have you ever felt this way before?"
"Do you feel this way all over, or just in certain areas of your body?"
"How terrible do you feel?"

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* For a more detailed explanation of "brainstorming", see Step 3--"Idea-Finding" on page C-19.

The doctor might confine the examination to questions, to a physical examination, and/or to laboratory tests. He/she would take whatever steps are necessary to gain sufficient information in sufficient detail to be assured of pinpointing the reason for the complaints--mainly by noting what is different from normal (what should be).

The same procedure applies to diagnosing any situation. For example, a conflict between two group members can be analyzed by asking information-seeking questions like:

"When do the disagreements occur?"
"What seems to happen just before the conflicts occur?"
"Have there been similar conflicts in the past?"
"Are either of the individuals having similar conflicts in other settings?"

In practice, you would ask many more questions and gather more facts, until you felt you had exhausted your search. Consensus test to obtain agreement to stop "brainstorming", then:

Second, Focus Thinking

Evaluate the facts that have been generated by testing their:

1. Accuracy
2. Acceptance
3. Importance

Many so-called "facts" may be merely opinions, hunches or wishful thinking. Now is the time to separate fact from opinion by seeking consensus agreement on which facts are supported by evidence and which aren't.

Sometimes the accuracy of facts may have to be checked out. If some of your initial questions were not able to be answered, and you can delay your problem-solving, then by all means, check out (verify) disputed facts while you gather more facts. Some facts, of course, are unimportant. To clarify things, obtain consensus to discard them. Summarize and categorize your facts.

Summary Thus Far

The problem-solving process often begins with a "messy" perception or question of a problem situation or goal. To insure that a well-defined problem is obtained, first:

Expand Thinking (Think Diversely) Defer Judgment

A. Stretch the problem situation to see how much it covers by listing all of the facts that you can which describe the "problem" or "mess." Brainstorm answers to "what" questions such as:

"What are the components of the 'problem'?"
"What are its difficulties?"
"What are its requirements?"
"What are its goals?"
"Where are we?" (situation)
"Where do we want to be?: (target)
"What happened before and after the "problem situation arose?"

Focus Thinking (Think Convergently) Evaluate

B. Separate facts from opinions. Select the most important facts. Focus on those facts that describe what is and what should be. (The differences give clues as to what the problem really is.)

Circle the most significant unanswered questions and try to find answers to these questions, using the best resources available. Postpone further problem-solving if necessary.

Exercise

Of the techniques listed, check (✓) those which a chairperson would use to aid in participative problem-solving.

_____ 1. Check with participants (consensus-test) before ending one step and starting in on the next step of the problem-solving process.

_____ 2. If an impasse is reached, suggest that the group re-cycle back to a prior step and re-attack the "problem."

_____ 3. Begin each problem-solving step by asking participants to "defer judgment."

_____ 4. Always begin "problem-solving" by listing the facts.

_____ 5. When participants become silent, proceed to the next step or procedure.

_____ 6. Insist that the group follow the problem-solving steps linearly (no backing up).

_____ 7. Place a premium on speed.

_____ 8. Make sure everyone agrees on the facts before you go on to "problem-finding."

_____ 9. Turn objections to any proposed question into an addition to a list under the heading "Criteria for Evaluation."

_____10. During "fact-finding", when participants voice "facts" which you know are really just opinions, post them and wait until later to evaluate them.

Answers

1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10

I SAY SURROUND THE FORT AT NIGHT, AND LAUNCH A SURPRISE ATTACK AT DAWN!
I'M FOR BURNING THEM OUT WITH FIRE ARROWS!
HIT 'EM WITH A FIERCE, SLASHING FRONTAL ATTACK!
OFFHAND, I'D OPT FOR A THOROUGH FEASIBILITY STUDY BY A REPUTABLE FIRM.

STEP 2: PROBLEM-FINDING (GENERATING HYPOTHESES)

Once you have described the problem situation (that is, gathered all of the relevant facts) the next step is to generate problem statements or hypotheses. Begin by brainstorming all possible causes of the "problem situation" until you and your group have exhausted your ability to elicit any more problem statements from the facts. Later, determine which one is the most likely cause of your "problem situation."

In a sense, problem-finding might be described as "problem redefining," or "problem analysis." Some sort of problem is implicit in the "fuzzy problem"--usually including a goal or objective to be achieved. So you need to look over both your "fuzzy problem" and your facts, and jot down all of the problem questions that occur to you. What you are trying to do at this point is to get a better understanding of the entire problem situation.

This is what a doctor does once the facts have been gathered relating to an illness. He/she asks, "How did this illness come about? Could it be caused by nervous tensions? By a virus? Why a virus? Is there a vitamin deficiency?" Then, the doctor determines which of the possible causes is most likely the correct one.

Notice that the doctor first stated the problem in the form of a question. Then he/she questioned one of the answers to the initial question. Finally, he/she considered obstacles (deficiencies) that might prevent good health. You can do this by: a) creative questions, b) broadening the question and c) narrowing the question.

Creative Questions. We often tend to focus on "negative" questions when we investigate problems. Negative questions limit our search for solutions. A creative (positive) question, in contrast, opens up a problem situation to a variety of creative solutions.

How does one open a problem by creative definition? By changing the wording to positive and placing, at the beginning of the sentence, the words "In what ways might we...?" For instance:

Ordinary Definition: "How can we cut down on tardy members?"

Creative Definition: "In what ways might we increase punctuality?"

Ordinary Definition: "Why has our morale decreased?"

Creative Definition: "In what ways might we raise our morale?"

Ordinary Definition: "Why is there a lack of respect for my leadership?"

Creative Definition: "In what ways might we make my leadership more effective?"

Broadening the Question. Suggest that a wider perspective be attained by asking "why?" or "for what?" for each problem statement generated so far. Read over a problem statement and ask yourself why you feel that may be your problem. Tell yourself the reason...this will usually be another goal, desire, need, etc. Then turn that answer around and write that reason in the form of another problem statement.

Example:

Question: "In what ways might we improve the ground rules?"

Response: "For what?" or "Why?"

One Reason: "In order to increase free expression of opinion."

Restatement: "In what ways might we increase free expression of opinion?"

This restatement naturally raises further possibilities of increasing free expression other than "improving the ground rules." Raising problem definitions to a higher level is like going to the top of a tower and viewing the landscape from a different and far wider perspective.

Figure 4 on the next page illustrates how the number of possible solutions is expanded by broadening the problem statement as given. Note: "IWWMW" is a convenient abbreviation for "In what way might we...."

Not every problem statement should be raised to a higher level, and sometimes this technique is unsuitable. The best way is just to try it for each of your initial problem statements and see if it helps in acquiring a wider perspective of the problem.

Narrowing the Question. Just as a wider perspective changes your outlook, it sometimes pays to narrow initial problem statements, especially if they are so broad or complicated that a brief look at them suggests a list of sub-problem areas. Each is a possibility for further attack.

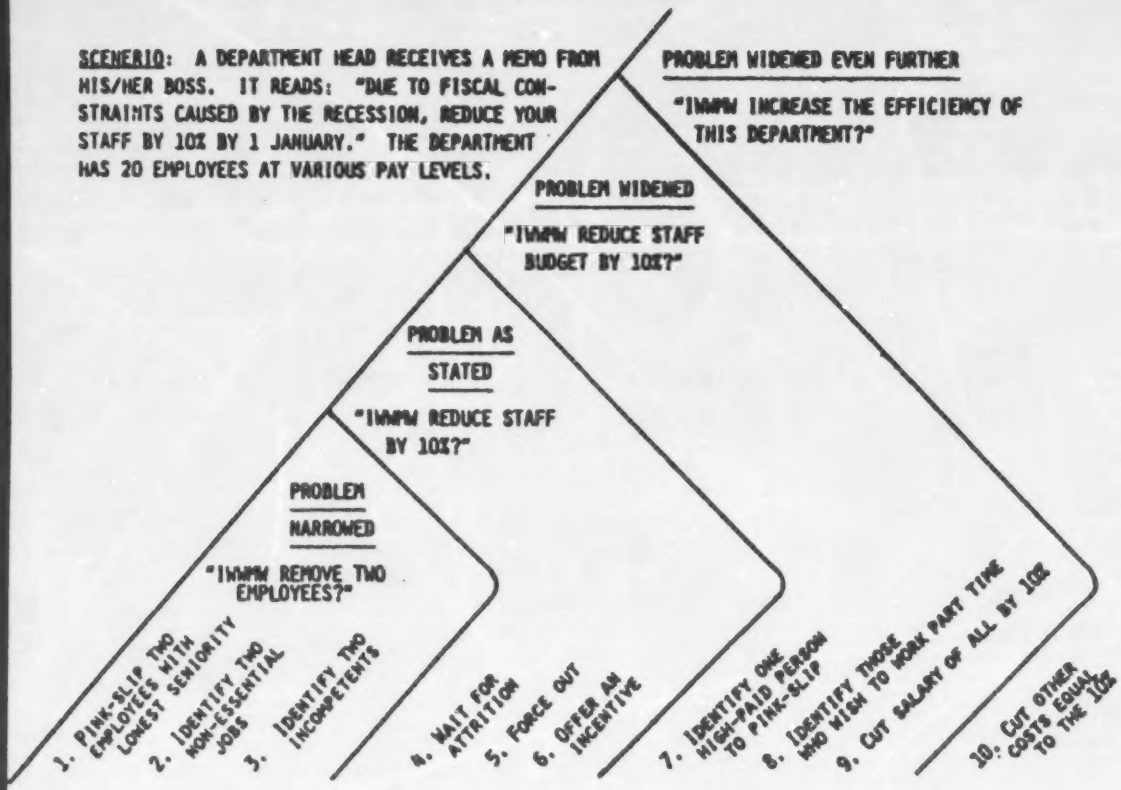
Example:

Initial (broad) problem statement: "In what ways might we increase attendance?"

Possible sub-problems that might be suggested immediately are:

"IWWMW provide better incentives."
"IWWMW make meetings more interesting."
"IWWMW obtain members who would naturally be more interested."
"IWWMW train members how to participate more fully."
"IWWMW train the chairperson how to lead better meetings."
"IWWMW train all of us to help run better meetings."
etc.

Figure 4


SCENERIO: A DEPARTMENT HEAD RECEIVES A MEMO FROM HIS/HER BOSS. IT READS: "DUE TO FISCAL CONSTRAINTS CAUSED BY THE RECESSION, REDUCE YOUR STAFF BY 10% BY 1 JANUARY." THE DEPARTMENT HAS 20 EMPLOYEES AT VARIOUS PAY LEVELS.
PROBLEM WIDENED EVEN FURTHER
"IWMPW INCREASE THE EFFICIENCY OF THIS DEPARTMENT?"
PROBLEM WIDENED
"IWMPW REDUCE STAFF BUDGET BY 10%?"
PROBLEM AS STATED
"IWMPW REDUCE STAFF BY 10%?"
PROBLEM NARROWED
"IWMPW REMOVE TWO EMPLOYEES?"
1. PINK-SLIP TWO EMPLOYEES WITH LOWEST SENIORITY
2. IDENTIFY TWO NON-ESSENTIAL JOBS
3. IDENTIFY TWO INCOMPETENTS
4. WAIT FOR ATTRITION
5. FORCE OUT
6. OFFER AN INCENTIVE
7. IDENTIFY ONE HIGH-PAID PERSON TO PINK-SLIP
8. IDENTIFY THOSE WHO WISH TO WORK PART TIME
9. CUT SALARY OF ALL BY 10%
10. CUT OTHER COSTS EQUAL TO THE 10%
POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

Note that although each of these sub-problems can be considered to be a possible "solution" to the initial problem statement, they might not have even been considered if one hadn't generated the initial, broad problem statement!

There are two additional ways of generating sub-problems (narrowing the question):

1. Consider restraining factors--obstacles or reasons why the "problem" situation exists.

   Ask "Why does the gap or discrepancy exist?" or "Why don't we have the expected result?" These questions elicit a list of blocks or obstacles that prevent the expected results from being achieved. Each obstacle identified, of course, represents a sub-problem which may or may not be solvable.

   When answering these questions, it pays to thoroughly explore the following locations:

   (a) work load
   (b) leadership (including you)*
   (c) training
   (d) reinforcement/recognition for performance
   (e) group norms or influences
   (f) fairness
   (g) cooperation
   (h) personal problems

   Example:

   "Problem": "Cooperation among group members is terrible."

   "Why don't we have cooperation?"

   (Barriers or blocks)

   (a) "Everyone over-reacts to errors and seeks to blame others."

   (b) "No pay off or recognition for cooperating."

   (c) "Interpersonal and work problems never get solved."

   (d) "Confusion over who is to do what."

   Each of these barriers are specific sub-problems, each of which, when solved, might help to solve the initial general problem.

   Restate them positively, e.g.:

   (b) "IWWMW recognize employees for cooperating?"

   This technique is especially useful when problems appear to be either very complex, vague (fuzzy) or unmanageable.

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* Note: When you are frustrated, you will tend to locate the "problem" with some individual (or group) other than yourself. Thus, your behavior in the situation is likely to be overlooked. Since most problems with group members is partly of your own making, you increase the likelihood of accurate problem locating by including yourself as a possible "obstacle."

2. Consider facilitating factors--things, people or events which have a positive influence on the problem situation. For example, if you note that "wine and cheese tend to increase attendance at meetings," and "well planned agendas increase satisfaction with the way meetings are run" then you might restate these observations (facts) as problem statements such as:

   a. "In what ways might we (IWWMW) offer incentives to attend meetings?"

   b. "IWWMW improve the way meetings are run?"

Decision Point. At this stage it is worth examining the different sub-problems elicited to see whether or not you have sufficient information to begin deciding which ones are the main sub-problems. If not, you need further information.

In Figure 5, a complicated problem was broken up into its various aspects (1, 2, 3, etc.). These, in turn, were categorized into three major sub-problems (A, B, and C).

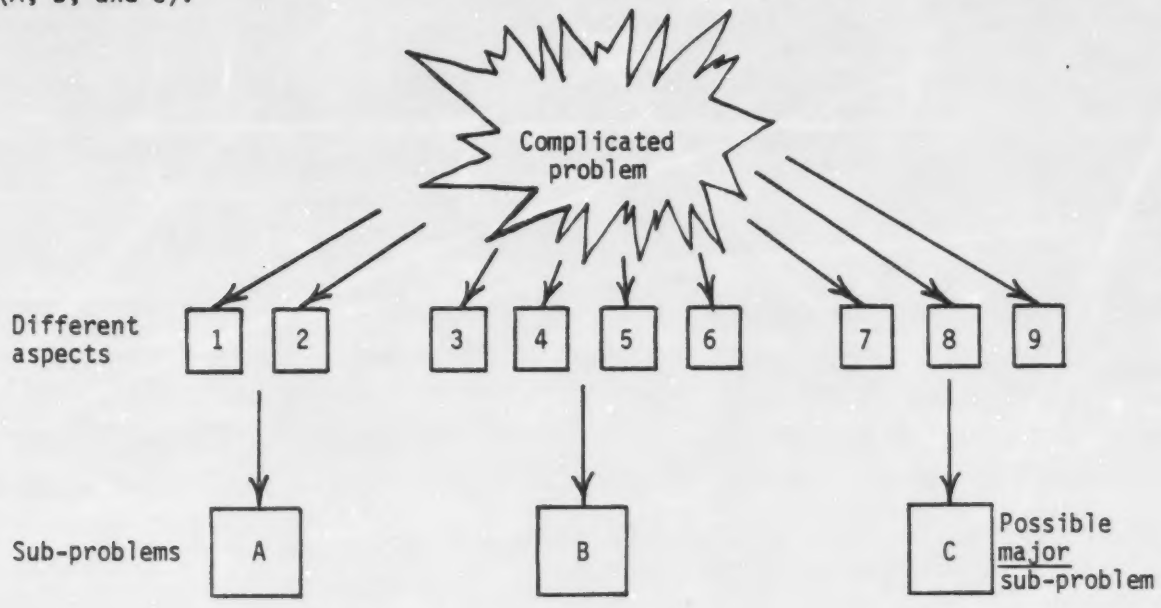

Figure 5. Breaking up a complicated problem

At this stage you still do not know:

a. Which, if any, is the major sub-problem that, if dealt with, will clear up the whole problem.

b. Whether you have sufficient information about each sub-problem to find solutions for it.

Here you must make a decision: Do you wish to gather further information on these sub-problems or not?

If you decide that you need further information, you should decide by whom and by when it must be collected.

If you decide you have all the information you need, or see no way of gathering further information, you can go ahead.

If you decide to go ahead, you can begin dealing with the sub-problems.

If everyone is sure that one of the sub-problems is the major one, you can give it a creative definition and go ahead with Idea-Finding.

If you are not sure which one is the major sub-problem, you can either deal with each sub-problem, one by one; or divide our group into three sub-groups, each sub-group beginning to work on solutions for its sub-problem.

Summary. The objective of Step 2 is to generate as many problem-statements as possible--using diverse thinking. The conclusion of Step 2 is to select the most promising problem statement (from those generated) for creative attack. It may be the problem statement that permits the generation of the widest range of possibilities--one that includes other problem-statements. Or it may be a much narrower statement--one that, according to the facts accumulated, seems to be the real cause of the problem. The over-all objective of the problem identification stage is to locate the most likely cause of the "problem situation." If it later turns out that the problem statement chosen is inappropriate, you can return to Step 1 and seek more facts--from which additional problem statements can be hypothesized--or return to Step 2 and choose one of the other problem statements.

STEP 3: IDEA-FINDING (BRAINSTORMING POSSIBILITIES)

Once a problem statement has been selected, you should begin brainstorming possible solutions. Since most problems have more than one solution, the group leader should be concerned at this point with eliciting as many solutions as possible. Strict enforcement of the following ground rules is essential:

- Quantity is sought

  "We are after quantity and not quality. We want to get as many ideas as possible, as varied and different from each other as can be."

- Absolutely no evaluation (defer judgment)

  "If you criticize, snicker or joke about ideas which are brought forward--even if they are strange--you are stifling creatively. Others will be afraid to bring forward unconventional ideas. Often the unconventional idea can trigger a chain reaction that leads to quality solutions."

- The more original, unthinkable, and wilder the ideas, the better

  "Don't censor yourself. Censoring and evaluating will be done later. Let your mind play freely with ideas--whether strange, unusual, or seemingly impractical--and write them down."

- Modify and piggyback upon the ideas of others

  "Sometimes "unusual" or "impractical" ideas can be made practical by changing some of its aspects--so modify it instead of rejecting it."

The general criterion for group participation should be bursts of originality and "newness" of ideas generated. Many will be absurd but others will be, upon later observation, very innovative, yet practical.

Where participants have status differences, it may be appropriate to have each group member write their ideas down, alone, for 5-10 minutes. Then list the results for all to see and ask group members to:

- Add ideas that were triggered by those posted.
- Combine two ideas and see if a new one emerges.
- Modify, magnify, minify, rearrange ideas.

In general:

A. List as many ideas as possible; when participants appear to have exhausted their ideas, push for a few more--the last ones generated are often the most creative.

B. Select those ideas which seem to offer the best potential. Scratch any which appear so impractical that everyone agrees they are useless.

Note: If the original problem statement is quite broad, the ideas listed at this point may really be "sub-problems." In such cases, choose one of these "sub-problems" at a time, ask "In what ways might we...?" and record the solutions.

As noted above, diversity of background and experience is a basic condition for productive group problem-solving. However, diversity also increases the amount of potential conflict among group members. Thus, diversity can be either a serious liability or a great asset, depending on how the chairperson handles it. He/she should:

1. view disagreement positively.
2. protect and support minority viewpoints.
3. seek as many points of view as possible at each step in the problem-solving process.
4. explore differences fully at each step--to prevent "hidden agenda" surprises later.

Example:

When untrained supervisors were asked to obtain a second solution to a problem, after they had obtained a first one, it was found that the second solutions tended to be superior to the first. It seems that dominant individuals influenced the first solution, had "won" their point and therefore ceased to dominate the search for a second solution.

Note: Sometimes it is appropriate to list organizational constraints before idea-finding is initiated. See Appendix B.

Exercise

Check (✓) those techniques which ought to facilitate "Problem-Finding" and "Idea-Finding."

_____ 1. Restate, in a creative way, questions that emerge from the facts.

_____ 2. Insist that broader questions be considered by asking "why?" of each problem statement generated.

_____ 3. Insist that narrowing questions be considered; suggest that participants separate obstacles from positive factors and focus only on the obstacles.

_____ 4. When brainstorming, allow individuals to criticize if they "piggyback" immediately.

_____ 5. When participants have status differences that might interfere with free expression, use Roberts Rules of Order instead of brainstorming.

_____ 6. When brainstorming, as participants have exhausted their ideas, insist that they think of some more because now they will typically think only of novel and innovative ones.

ONE OF OUR BIG BUYERS IS TOURING THE PLANT TOMORROW!
WE WANT TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION!
ANY IDEAS?
I WON'T BE HERE TOMORROW! IT'S MY DAY OFF!
VERY GOOD! ANY OTHER SUGGESTIONS ??

Answers

1, 2, 6

STEP 4: SOLUTION-FINDING (EVALUATING ALTERNATIVES)

Decisions! Decisions!

At some point in participative problem-solving (PPS) you will have to evaluate the ideas that you and your employees have had fun generating. And it's not unlikely that you'll have a whole list of tentative solutions that range from those that look weird and impractical to those that look sensible and immediately useful. So you will probably be confronted with two questions:

1. How do we choose the best solution?

2. How do we make sure that our choice will be acceptable?

Solution-finding and Acceptance-finding, the fourth and fifth steps of the PPS sequence should help to answer these questions.

Typically, most decision-makers evaluate ideas in haphazard ways, relying primarily on hunches or intuitive guesses. Others prefer to give up their decision-making opportunity to chance; they toss dice or flip coins. Others look at the list of creative ideas and leave--they want to avoid the responsibility (and/or work) of choosing.

Still others like to discuss the options and then vote on them. However, this method of choosing usually ends up with a win/lose outcome.

"Win/lose" decision-making means that the losers are often forced to accept a solution which is unsatisfactory to them. They may, and often do, react with feelings of rejection, failure, anger and hostility. Such attitudes may, and often do, lead to "getting back" (e.g., sabotage of the solution or "foot-dragging" in carrying it out).

Bargaining, negotiating, compromising, and similar approaches to the handling of conflict are also, essentially, forms of win lose decision-making. They all start with a relatively clear solution which each party prefers and wishes to attain. Each party strives to attain its preferred solution by forcing others to accept it.

I HAVE HERE THE SUGGESTIONS I ASKED YOU TO SUBMIT ON WAYS TO PUT CAMP SWAMPY ON THE MAP
FIRST OF ALL, BRIBING THE MAP-MAKER IS OUT!
MORT WALKER

Here, as previously noted, the goal is to obtain a "win/win" or consensus decision. However, to achieve such a goal you will need to use three solution-finding procedures. Their use will help you to avoid jumping from solutions to a decision without fully evaluating each one. Before turning to them, however, you may need to do some preliminary combining and screening.

When a brainstorming (idea-finding) session ends, you may be faced with a staggering number of possible solutions. To maintain progress it may be appropriate to perform an initial screening:

First, have the group combine similar solutions (as noted above).

Second, if there are any solutions that all can agree are too impractical or impossible, these can be eliminated. (However, everyone must fully agree. If one person still wants any solution to stay, it must be included.)

Before the remaining solutions can be evaluated, you must establish explicit criteria. If this step isn't done together, personal preferences come into play and a "win/lose" attitude may result.

A. Establishing Criteria

First, ask group members to "brainstorm" criteria which can be used to evaluate the proposed solutions. What "yardsticks" do they think will be useful in accepting or rejecting them?

As you record them, combine those that are similar. If there is disagreement over the meaning of a criterion, discuss it until agreement is reached.

Remember to include those criteria which were suggested during problem-finding and idea-finding.

Techniques for eliciting appropriate criteria:

1. Ask the question: "No matter what solution we choose, what are we trying to...

   ...achieve?"
   ...maintain?"
   ...avoid?"

   Achieve criteria focus on improving the situation (i.e., more cooperation).

   Maintain criteria focus on keeping those things or values that you don't want to lose (i.e., fair work load).

   Avoid criteria focus on things you don't want the solution to cause (i.e., higher costs, more meetings).

2. Ask "What qualities would a good solution have?" "A bad solution?"

3. Ask "What standards does an alternative have to meet in order to be acceptable?"

4. Break broad or general criteria into more concrete or specific definitions. For example, the criterion of "feasible" means many things to many people. If asked, members should be able to specify what they mean more precisely: e.g., "economically feasible (no more than $200)." or "within policy limitations."

5. When the group has exhausted their ideas, present this list of common criteria to stimulate more criteria:

   - cost (How much will it cost now? Later?)
   - time (How much of our time will it require?)
   - timeliness (Can it be done by when it's needed?)
   - resources (Do we have the skills required? Equipment?)
   - by-products (What new problems will be created? Positive ones?)
   - risk (Can we afford to fail? What are the consequences?)
   - acceptance (How will others view it?)

Group development of explicit criteria has several benefits:

1. It enables group members to share their values and to re-examine the assumptions on which they are made.

2. Consensus on criteria, before evaluation begins, helps maintain a "win/win" attitude.

Finally, after brainstorming, examine the list. Combine similar criteria. Rank the rest in order of importance. Select those that seem to be most critical for evaluation.

Note: A technique for weighting criteria is described in Appendix C.

B. Evaluating Possibilities

There are a variety of approaches which you can use to facilitate the evaluation process. Your choice depends on the complexity of the problem, the amount of disagreement, and the number of proposed solutions available.

1. When only two solutions have been proposed, and neither commands a clear-cut advantage over the other:

   a. Draw a horizontal line across a piece of paper (newsprint).

   b. Write one solution at the top and the other solution at the bottom of the page.

   c. Ask participants to state their reasons for supporting either of the alternatives, in a few words, without discussion or explanation.

   d. Write each reason, in a few words, on the side of the alternative which it supports. See Figure 6.

   Note: Convert negative reasons against one alternative into a positive support for the other alternative (e.g., "Alternative B will cost too much" becomes "cost is low" in support of alternative A).

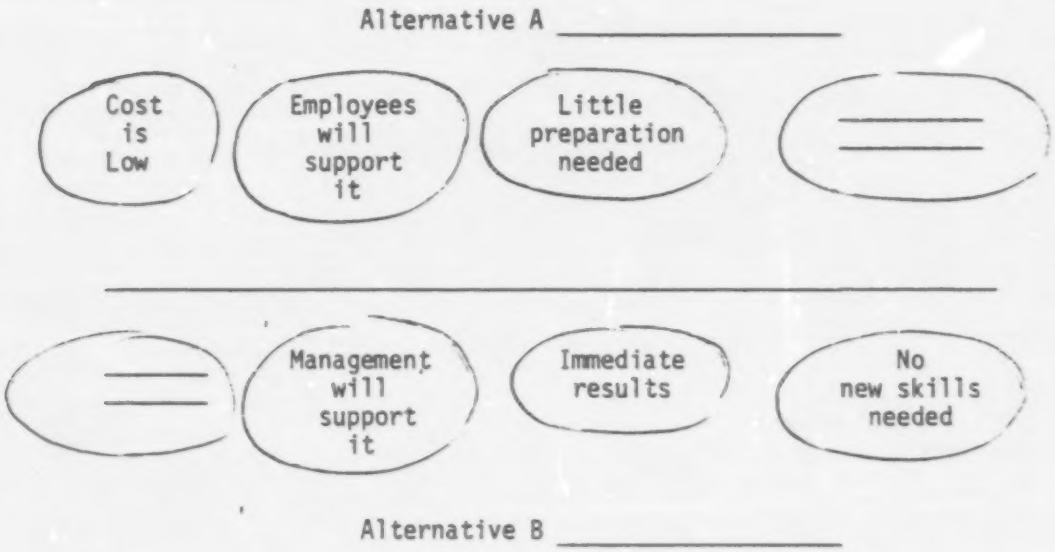

Figure 6. Form of Supporting Alternatives with Reason

   e. Elicit open discussion of the reasons listed.

f. Ask each participant to divide 10 points among the reasons supporting <u>each</u> alternative.

   Example: if someone feels the reason "cost is low" supports alternative A quite a bit, they might assign it 5 or 6 of the 10 possible points allocated to alternative A. Likewise, if someone feels that "immediate results" supports alternative B only a little, then they might assign it only 1 or 2 points of the 10 points allocated to alternative B. This step should help everyone to see the reasoning, even for alternatives they don't support.

g. Tally the results of everyone's points for each reason.

h. Redraw the figure on a new piece of paper but now only include the 2 or 3 highest ranked reasons on each side.

i. Ask each person to divide 10 points among those remaining reasons on <u>either</u> side of the sheet.

j. Tally the results and you should have a winner.

This technique helps committees to evaluate opposing viewpoints in a positive manner. It may be an eye-opener to the value of a win/win approach to decision-making.

NOTE: <u>Attempts will be made by those in conflict to have you decide which solution is best</u>. It is best to <u>avoid</u> such a temptation because it often sets up a "win/lose" situation for you. No matter which solution is chosen, one solution "loses" and so do those who proposed it. If there has been sufficient energy and emotion invested in that "losing" solution, those who lose may seek to retaliate in order to "save face." Sabotage of the "winning" solution is not uncommon and then the organization winds up also losing. Thus, it pays to <u>resist becoming a judge</u>; instead, resolve conflicting solutions by trying to have <u>all needs met</u>.

2. <u>When several solutions have been proposed, a Decision Matrix should be used</u>.

Draw a matrix as shown below and list <u>solutions</u> down one side. The <u>criteria</u> that have been generated previously are listed across the top, in order--"<u>achieve</u>", followed by "<u>maintain</u>" and finally "<u>avoid</u>" criteria.

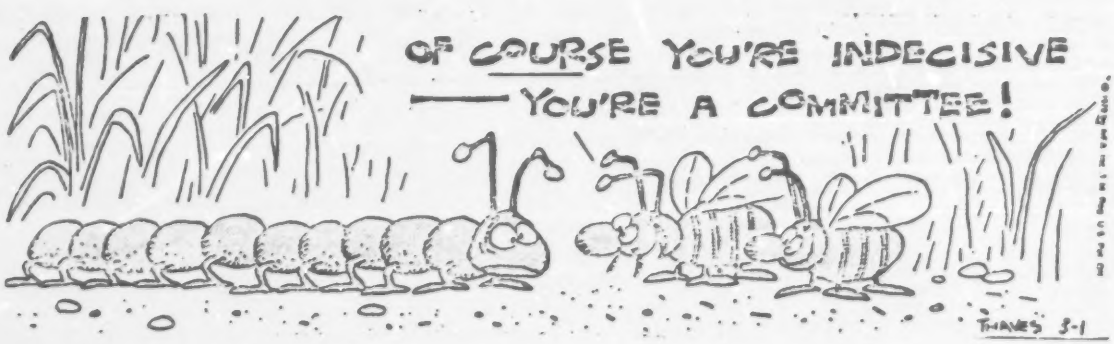

Figure 7. Decision Matrix

	Criteria (Achieve, Maintain, Avoid)										
	Acceptance	Committment	Time	Resistance	Cost						How Modify?
1. Proposal A											
2. Proposal B											
3. Proposal C											
4. Proposal D											
5. Proposal E											
6. Proposal F											
7. Proposal G											

After the solutions and criteria have been listed in the matrix, compare each solution against each criteria by using a key:

✓ = OK (yes, agreeable, acceptable)	(or)	++ = very good
? = Maybe (don't know, might be OK)		+ = good
X = No (not agreeable, not acceptable)		o = neutral
		- = not so good
		-- = bad

Some criteria usually outweigh or are much more important than other criteria. If what appears to be the best solution receives a "?" or an "X" for important criteria, then answer the question: "How can we change the proposed solution so as to satisfy all criteria?" Ask "How can we eliminate or reduce the weak points of the "good" proposals?"

New solutions might be sought if the ones at hand fail to meet all of the important criteria or a stalemate (tie) occurs. Perhaps further information is needed to clarify an evaluation. The decision can then be postponed, if possible.

C. Selecting A Solution

In some situations the superiority of a particular solution may be so obvious that there is no problem in selecting a solution. However, when several acceptable solutions exist, selection becomes difficult. Try the following:

1. Integrate alternative solutions. Take the best of two or more solutions and try out several combinations. By revising and integrating solutions, many novel solutions often occur.

   There are two conditions that call for attempts at integration:

   a. The group has located the obstacles to solving the problem, but none of the solutions satisfies anyone. Here, the group has got to "get out of the rut"--maybe by trying to locate alternative obstacles that can be overcome.

b. There is a marked conflict between two group factions. If they can come up with an alternative solution which integrates or incorporates elements of both sides, not only will its probability of acceptance be higher, but perhaps a better solution will have been generated.

Remember, idea integrations or solution patterns often appear suddenly--a product of the group's mutual interaction or reinforcement. You cannot force it, but you can be ready for it by keeping your mind open for new combinations and by reinforcing and protecting every new or cautious attempt to combine solutions.

2. Suggest experimentation. When two alternative solutions cannot be integrated, it may be possible to experiment with each and compare the results.

Ground rules at this point are:

a. Strive for consensus. Satisfaction with a decision is not merely the opportunity to participate, but whether one feels satisfied with the amount of influence he/she has in the final decision.

b. Treat "failure to agree" as the responsibility of the group--not just your responsibility. The problem of how to deal with the group's disagreement should be dealt with openly. The group may agree to accept a majority opinion, to require complete agreement, or to have you arbitrarily make the decision yourself.

c. Avoid "conflict-reducing" techniques. Techniques such as voting, averaging, coin flipping, or trading prevent open and integrative resolution of problems. When such artificial means are used in lieu of seeking consensus, "lose/lose" or "win/lose" solutions will usually emerge. For example, in a conflict situation, a "win/lose" solution can only result when you are asked to make the decision.

d. Protect minority opinions. In order to balance opposing viewpoints, the leader must protect individuals who are attacked, especially the weak. You should rephrase personal attacks so the disagreement is made one of differences in ideas rather than a conflict between personalities. Even vocal minority opinions must be protected and tolerated. Explanation of the problems and inconveniences that minorities may experience as a result of certain solutions can outweigh the preferences of a majority. At least explore them and thus increase satisfaction with the amount of influence exercised.

e. Get fears out in the open. You should ask more conservative-minded individuals to express their fears about any solution posed. By bringing fears out into the open, each solution can be realistically evaluated. Note: Indecision is actually a decision, regardless of whether or not one wants it to be.

Exercise

Check (✓) those procedures which should lead to consensus solution selection.

_____ 1. Ask for a show of hands on which proposed solution is best.

_____ 2. Invite individuals to express their reasons for opposing acceptable solutions.

_____ 3. When all solutions have been fully discussed, thank everyone and choose the best one yourself.

_____ 4. When three alternative solutions are equally acceptable, suggest experimenting with each and comparing results.

_____ 5. Prevent any attempts to integrate alternative solutions.

_____ 6. Insist that the group meet until some action is agreed upon.

_____ 7. Rephrase remarks of disagreement so that differences focus on ideas rather than personalities.

_____ 8. If many solutions are present, reject, by yourself, those that obviously do not stand a chance of being chosen.

_____ 9. Persuade conservative-minded members that their fears are ridiculous and that you must have action.

_____10. Insist that "failure to agree" is the group's responsibility, not yours alone.

_____11. If you can't get everyone to agree on a solution, suggest that you make the decision or that higher-ups arbitrarily make it.

_____12. Identify and eliminate those solutions which certain members of the group (including yourself) cannot possibly accept.

Solutions

2, 4, 7, 10, 12.

Exercise

Write in the space provided, the letters of each and every procedure which could have been introduced by the leader to prevent the counterproductive results described.

A. Get fears out in open
B. Integrate alternative solutions
C. Experiment
D. Strive for unanimity (consensus)
E. Protect minority opinions
F. Reduce number of solutions
G. Eliminate unacceptable solutions

_____ 1. Two members get hostile and leave the meeting.

_____ 2. Two weeks after a major decision was made, you are having trouble getting it carried out.

_____ 3. You hear that the females in the group feel that you discriminate against them.

_____ 4. You learn that group members feel that your "new" consensus-seeking leadership style is just as <u>autocratic</u> as traditional methods.

_____ 5. Your meeting to make a decision has lasted until past midnight.

_____ 6. Two factions had solidified their positions. Both seemed to have merit but the one the group chose just didn't quite solve the problem.

_____ 7. Several members come up and congratulate you for standing up to two over-demanding individuals. You are not so sure you did the right thing--they were <u>too</u> quiet for the rest of the meeting.

_____ 8. Your group arrived at a number of possible solutions to the _____ problem in your unit. Due to your failure to discipline yourself, you rejected a solution which later was shown to be the best one.

_____ 9. Your group chose one solution and tried it. It worked partially--but you'll never know about that other one.

_____10. Several members of the group always want to table the problem.

Solutions:

1. a,e., 2. b,c,d. 3. e. 4. a,d,e. 5. c,f,b,g.
6. B,c,d. 7. a,e. 8. e,b. 9. c. 10. a.

STEP 5: ACCEPTANCE-FINDING (ACTION PLANNING)

Selecting a solution from several alternatives or putting several alternatives into one integrated solution doesn't end the problem-solving process. There are three more procedures still to be performed. You need to determine exactly what needs to be done; you need to determine how you will know when the problem is improved or solved, and you need to determine what could go wrong (before it does!).

Note. These procedures are written to cover complex situations. In this way, we can be sure of covering them completely. However, many situations will be very simple. For example, if you only need to gain approval for your proposed solution, try the technique described in Appendix D.

Develop an Implementation Plan

Your group will need answers to questions such as:

(a) What is to be done in specific terms?
(b) In what order is it to be done?
(c) What schedule is to be followed?
(d) Who will do what?
(e) How will everything be coordinated?
(f) Who will do the coordination?

In determining what needs to be done, try to identify the resources you will need, how to get them, people outside the group with whom you may have to communicate and the steps required for doing all of these things. The steps should be specific enough for the people in the group to understand how to perform them. In general, identification of the steps should proceed from the general to the specific.

You can work forward or backward. To work backward, look at the desired solution and ask, "what is the step needed just prior to arriving there?" Then from that step, determine the one just prior to it, and so on until you arrive back at your starting point (e.g., planning a trip by a roadmap).

So, after a solution or combination of solutions has been selected, post it and ask group members to brainstorm again:

> "Think of as many ways, as possible, of implementing, carrying out, accomplishing, gaining acceptance for, ensuring effectiveness of and/or improving the solution(s) chosen."

After they have exhausted their ideas, have them go back and circle the "best" ones. Then, ask them to:

(a) list for each circled idea, as many alternatives as they can to the questions: "Who?" "When?" "Where?"

(b) list as many alternatives as possible to the questions: "How?" and/or "Why?"

As participants slow in their generation of ideas, elicit more by asking each of the following questions (if no response is triggered, go on):

(a) IWWMI gain acceptance from others? How: When? Where? Why?

(b) IWWMI insure cooperation? How? When? Where? Why?

(c) IWWMI gain enthusiasm for the idea? How? When? Where? Why?

(d) What objections, limitations, obstacles might arise?

(e) IWWMI overcome them? When? Where? Why?

(f) IWWMI improve, safeguard or fortify the idea? When?

(g) Who or what group might help with the idea?

(h) IWWMI reward myself or others for helping carry out the idea? Who? When? Where? Why?

(i) IWWMI pretest or experiment with my idea? When? Where? Why?

(j) What next steps might I take to initiate action? How? When? Where? Why?

(k) What time-lines might I use? How? When? Where? Why?

(l) What follow-up feedback to measure progress is needed?

When participants have exhausted their contributions, ask them to choose their best answers and to develop an actual "action plan" to follow in implementing their solution(s): "My first step is...." My second step is...." Some steps might involve checking out facts.

Ask questions such as: "What steps absolutely must be performed before others? We want to keep the sequence as open as possible." Ask of each step, "What has to be done before we can do this?"

Estimate how long it will take to perform each step. Some steps may have to be pegged to others' work schedules. Identify these first and enter them at the appropriate points on a time line. Fill in the other steps on the time line around these fixed points. Examine each step's placement on the time line to make sure that there is enough time to get each step done. If not, where can you make adjustments?

Look at each step and determine whether it requires special skills and knowledge. This will guide the group in assigning responsibilities for performing each step.

How will the implementation be coordinated? Identify the critical steps in the time schedule, particularly those tied to fixed schedules. These give intermediate points around which to build monitoring of the implementation. How will progress be monitored? How will problems be reported and to whom? Will there be periodic reviews in which plans can be revised?

And, finally, who has the responsibility for coordinating? How will progress reports be made? Who will receive them? Who will re-allocate resources or modify schedules, if necessary?

Develop an Evaluation Plan

The group should collect information on how each part of its solution is working. And when the whole solution has been implemented, you will want to know how successful it has been. Do you still have a problem or have you achieved your goal? You will want both on-going and final evaluation.

First, identify as many possible indicators for each criterion from earlier in the problem solving process as you can. This means more brainstorming. In evaluating each measure, consider all the other things that may affect it. How likely are these other things to happen? Is this indicator sensitive only to problem solutions or is it sensitive to other things, too? Is it an easy indicator to fake or cheat? Next, look at how easy it is to make each kind of observation required for each measure. Is it feasible? Who can do it? How are the observations to be made? How are they to be recorded? Do different observers watching the same events see and record the same things?

Develop a Troubleshooting Plan

Murphy's Law states: "If anything can go wrong, it will." So try to get ahead of the game and anticipate new problems before they happen. Go through each step in the implementation plan and brainstorm possible ways in which things might go wrong. Evaluate them and strike out the less likely ones. Then try to develop contingency plans or prevention plans for each one that remains on the list. Appropriate parts of this information should be distributed to those people who will implement the solution(s).

Answer questions such as:

"What might go wrong?"
"Who might resist?"
"What could keep this solution from happening?"

Summary: An Action Planning Guide

1. Suggest various alternatives for action in implementing the goal.

2. Evaluate which is the most viable in terms of being:

   - immediately implementable
   - realistically attainable
   - acceptable to the entire group

3. State the "givens" in the situation (i.e., those factors which cannot be changed).

4. State the factors which can be acted upon.

5. Decide who needs to be involved in implementing the action.

6. List any materials or resources which may be required.
7. Sequence steps in taking action in terms of specific dates, times, etc.
8. Decide on a plan for evaluating the success of your action.
9. Forecast any consequences which you think will need to be considered.

HOW'D THE BRAINSTORMING SESSION GO?
FOR THE FIRST HOUR NOBODY CAME UP WITH ANYTHING
10-17
THEN THE MAJOR CAME UP WITH A DANDY IDEA!

"I think everyone today enjoyed my performance, if I do say so myself."

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APPENDICES

A. Summary of Problem-Solving Steps

B. Identifying Constraints Before "Idea-Finding"

When setting goals or objectives, identification of organizational constraints often helps to focus "idea-finding."

C. Paired Comparison Analysis

Criteria can be weighted by a simple paired comparison technique.

D. How to Gain Acceptance for a Proposal

Often committee decisions have to be presented to other faculty for their approval. Here's an effective method of gaining their acceptance.

by Miller. ©1977 The New Yorker Magazine, Inc.

"O.K., then, it's settled. We present it to the faculty with all its pros and cons, we let the department chairperson chew on it for a while, we go through a lot of soul-searching, and then we go ahead and do it."

Appendix A

SUMMARY OF PROBLEM-SOLVING STEPS

After Stating or Restating the "Problem" or "Mess" as a Question:

A "problem" is defined as a discrepancy between "what is" and "what should be."

"Why are so few members attending meetings."

STEP 1: FACT-FINDING (ANALYZING THE SITUATION)

Ask "What?", "Where?", "When?", "Who?" and "To what extent?" questions.

In general, determine what is (or is not) happening now, relative to what has (or has not) happened in the past.

Examples: "Who isn't coming?", "When don't they come?", "What type of meetings have the lowest attendance?", "What's new since we used to have full attendance?"

STEP 2: PROBLEM-FINDING (GENERATING HYPOTHESES)

In general, brainstorm all possible causes of the "problem situation" by posing numerous creative definitions of it.

Examples:

a. Ask, "In What Ways Might We...?" questions (stated in positive terms).

"IWWMW increase the number of members attending meetings?"

b. Broaden any problem-statement question generated by asking "Why?" or "For what?" and then restate the answer in an IWWMW format.

"Why?"
Answer: "To get more members involved," becomes "IWWMW increase member involvement?"

Answer: "Lack of recognition" becomes "IWWMW increase member recognition?"

c. Narrow any broad problem-statement question by asking: "What are the barriers, obstacles and/or reasons that possibly cause the "problem" to exist?" Each answer is restated in the IWWMW format.

Often problems are so broad, sub-problems or sub-sub-problems need to be addressed.

d. After reviewing all of the hypotheses generated, pick the one that appears to offer the most promise for solving the problem.

If the problem statement chosen leads to a "deadend," return for another one.

STEP 3: IDEA-FINDING (BRAINSTORMING POSSIBILITIES)

Elicit creative solutions and ideas by enforcing ground rules:

a. Quantity, not quality.	"The more ideas, the better"
b. Criticism is ruled out.	"No snickering"
c. Wild ideas are OK.	"Disregard conventionality"
d. Modify and combine ideas.	"Piggyback, synthesize"

STEP 4: SOLUTION-FINDING (EVALUATING ALTERNATIVES)

a. Establish Criteria:

(1) Elicit "yardsticks" by which the ideas or possibilities might be judged--criteria which can be used to accept or reject the ideas. Consider: time, cost, people, acceptance, resistance, new problems generated.

Examples:

Ask the question: "No matter what solution we choose, what are we trying to...

a. ...achieve?
b. ...maintain?
c. ...avoid?

(2) Select the most discriminating criteria for use in evaluating alternatives.

Break vague criteria, like "feasible," into concrete criteria, like "within budget limitations."

b. Evaluating Possibilities:

(1) If only two possibilities (solutions) look promising, examine the advantages and then the disadvantages of each by drawing a horizontal line and listing reasons for supporting either of the alternatives.

This method helps to prevent "yes-but" arguments since members are asked to focus on one task at a time. Do not move on until they have exhausted their ideas.

Then, have each member divide 10 points among the reasons supporting each

Example:

Alternative A: "Increase Recognition"

	Points (10 total)
1. gains commitment	____
2. appeals to egos	____
3. positive approach	____
4. cost is low	____

---

1. immediate results	____
2. appeals to materialistic members	____
3. appeals to chairperson	____

Alternative B: "Increase Incentives"

alternative and tally the results. Finally, have each member divide 10 points among the top 2 or 3 highest ranked reasons on either side of the line and tally the results.

(2) When several alternatives have been proposed, set up a "decision matrix" and "rate" each solution against each criterion by using a key such as:

✓ = yes (acceptable)
? = maybe (don't know)
X = no (not acceptable)

Example:

Problem: "How to increase attendance at meetings to 90%"

Solutions / Criteria	Less than $50?	Effect by 15th?	Acceptance by members?
1. Increase recognition	✓	X	✓
2. Involve members in setting agenda, etc.	✓	?	?
3. Provide incentives to attend	?	✓	✓

c. Selecting a Solution:

This step involves choosing the best alternative. In general, strive for consensus agreement and avoid "conflict-reducing" techniques.

Examples:

"Whatever alternative we choose, everyone must be willing to go along with it."

"No coin-flipping, voting, averaging or trading."

(1) Integrate alternative solutions.	"It appears that we could combine the first three solutions and check to see if they really increase attendance."
(2) Suggest experimentation and compare the results.	
(3) Protect minority opinions.	"Joe's objection to solution #1 appears valid; should #1 be eliminated?"
(4) Get fears out in the open by checking that needs are being met.	"Will your needs be met by solution #2, Mary?"

STEP 5: ACCEPTANCE-FINDING (ACTION PLANNING)

a. Develop an Implementation Plan

Initiate this step by asking members to answer questions such as:	Example
(1) What is to be done, specifically?	"Think of as many ways as possible of implementing, carrying out, accomplishing, gaining acceptance for, ensuring effectiveness of and/or improving the solutions chosen."
(2) In what order, by when?	
(3) Who will do what?	
(4) Who will do the coordination?	
b. Develop an Evaluation Plan	"Is a 90% attendance rate our only means of measuring success?"
c. Develop a Troubleshooting Plan	"What might go wrong?" "Who might resist?"

APPENDIX B

IDENTIFYING CONSTRAINTS BEFORE "IDEA-FINDING"

Dreaming up practical solutions to a "problem" is often enhanced when you know in general what you want to accomplish or what you have to work with. What results do you want to achieve? What resources (such as time, money, materials) do you have to draw upon? In other words, what are the limits to your creativity? What range of possibilities ought you to consider?

Example: When architects design houses, they do not simply set their creativity free. They start by gathering constraints or decision factors, such as the following:

- Construction cost of $80,000 or less
- Five bedrooms, two bathrooms, large living room, dining room, etc.
- Modern design but energy efficient
- Design appropriate to landscape of lot
- Suitable for owner and family: lawyer; wife; invalid mother requiring privacy; son, six; daughter, two; another child planned
- Must be completed in six months

These guidelines, of course, will limit and focus the architects' creativity. They will try to find a solution (develop a design) that fits within them.

Of course, the importance of various constraints will vary from group to group. In the design of a house some architects might place low construction cost as the primary concern, while others might place elegance of design, despite cost, above all.

Procedure

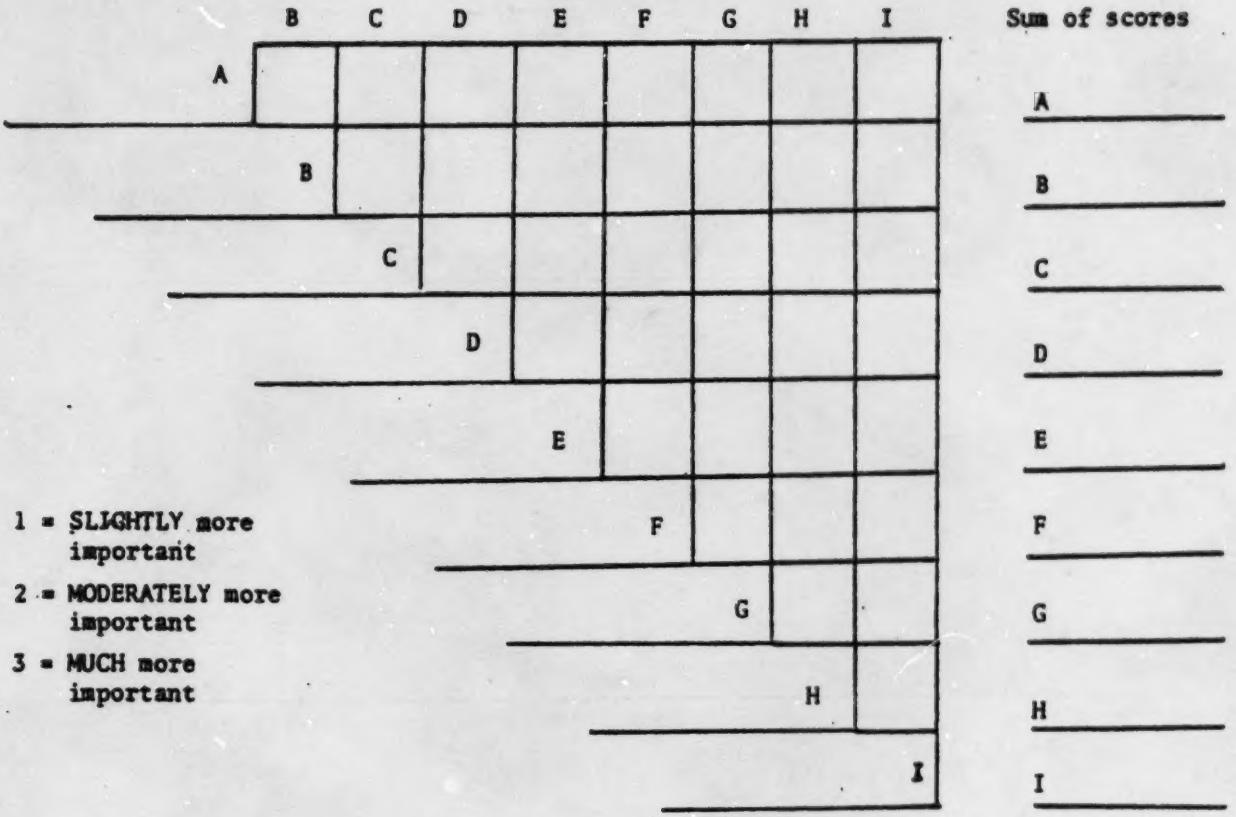
A. List as many guidelines or constraints as possible.

B. Select those which are seen as being most important.

Note: Since listing constraints may inhibit creativity, this step should only be used for new initiatives (e.g., setting goals) where idea-finding, without general limitation, might become unfocused and generate apathy.

APPENDIX C

PAIRED COMPARISON ANALYSIS



Consider only the two factors represented by each box formed by the intersection of the two axes of the grid. (Example: the left-most box on the top row is A&B, the box farthest to the right A&I, the left-most box in the third row is C&D)

1. Compare the two factors represented by each box and decide which is more important in your opinion.
2. Place the letter corresponding to the more important factor in the box.
3. Using the scale at the left of the grid assign a weight (or degree of importance) to the letter ... you are now saying how much more important.
4. Complete the grid by considering each box (pair of factors) progressing from left to right and top to bottom.
5. Total the numerical scores received by each factor (letter) to obtain the raw weights of the factors (Proportional weights may be derived by using the lowest score as one and calculating the rest)

APPENDIX D

HOW TO GAIN ACCEPTANCE FOR A PROPOSAL

When a committee has arrived at a decision, implementation of that decision often depends upon acceptance by other faculty. Since these "other" faculty will most likely have reservations about the proposed solution, an opportunity for them to express their concerns should be initiated--especially if the proposed solution has to have their approval.

Begin by writing the proposed solution on a chalkboard and describing it. Then, divide the space below it into three columns, by drawing lines down the board. Over the first column place the heading "Advantages"; over the second, "Disadvantages"; and over the third, "Ways to Minimize the Disadvantages".

Proposed Solution: _____

Advantages	Disadvantages	Ways to Minimize the Disadvantages

Then elicit and post, quickly, all of the advantages for the proposed solution. When the others can't think of any more advantages, list all of the disadvantages. When finished, summarize the advantages and disadvantages. Then ask for assistance in listing ways to minimize the disadvantages.

The length of the lists is unimportant; the purpose is to publicly consider both sides of the proposal for later final evaluation. The value of this technique lies in its focus on only one side of the proposal at a time. Instead of dividing into two sides, participants are asked, as a group, to make contributions to one side at a time. It is not uncommon for the same person to contribute items to all three columns.

Further, personal attacks are minimized with this objective and rational technique. Attacks or arguments can be reformulated by the leader into positive points to be listed under one of the columns. It then becomes unnecessary for anyone to defend their ideas.

Thus, this technique minimizes "yes-but" discussions, where one side gets the other side to stop talking with a "yes" and then counters with "but" and proceeds to criticize their idea. (Instead of listening to understand, "yes-but" listening is to refute or "put-down". Ideas become "good" or "bad"; sides are polarized.)

Once the positive and negative aspects of all the solutions have been explored, discussion of how best to avoid disadvantages generates mutual interest for all of the participants and therefore becomes the basis for cooperative problem-solving, if need be.